

"From Humble Beginnings....."

'The Safe House Project' Report



Sustainable Service

Responses to Family Violence in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in North Queensland

2004

The raising of children in Aboriginal family always involve aunts, mothers and especially grandmothers, I always remembered cherished moments spent with older women from my family, in particular my grandmothers and aunts explaining their experiences in life has helped me to appreciate the struggle they went through. Sadly though, today many women experience abuse and violence in many communities through out the Cape Gulf and Torres Straits.

- The joining hands of the women and children represent the unity in the struggle to address family violence within these communities.

- The red, white and yellow ochre dots represent all the coastal communities from which the women come from.
- The white circle of dots represents the gathering together through meetings and discussions held in their struggle to combat abuse and family violence.
- The map of North Queensland circled by the women and children represent where the struggle addressing the abuse and violence is happening.

About the Artist

Artist: Bungan (Sunlight) - Barbara Mundraby

Tribal Group: Yidinji

I was born in Cairns in 1972. My mother and father came from the Aboriginal Community of Yarrabah. My paintings depict a lot of my childhood, which was spent on the beach camping with the family. While my father was out hunting turtles and dugongs and fishing with all the men, I would be back on the beach playing with all my brothers, sisters and cousins. We would climb rocks, play games and go for long walks with all the mothers and aunties. I paint to share with others the respect I have for the ocean and the land. For many generations the sea has provided many families, nation wide, the traditional food needed for the survival of people as a race. These are my memories I share.

This report was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services through the National Homelessness Strategy and the Department of Communities.

Foreword

This report is a product of the research project, *Sustainable Service Responses to Family Violence in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in North Queensland* ('The Safe House Project').

The project was funded by the Australian Government through the National Homelessness Strategy, and the Queensland Government, to explore service responses for women and children in remote Indigenous communities who are affected by family violence.

This report is based on the information gathered through the action research processes of the project. The views expressed in the report therefore do not necessarily represent the views of either the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services or the Department of Communities.

I would like to thank the project worker and the project reference group who worked very hard to make this project a success. I wish to thank the staff and management of the 'safe house' services and to particularly acknowledge the tireless efforts of those Elder women who are the backbone of many of these services.

This project has made a valuable contribution to our knowledge of family violence service responses in remote Indigenous communities in North Queensland. It also highlights specific areas for consideration in building sustainable service responses for the years ahead.

Karen Copeland
Executive Director
Policy Directorate
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Acknowledgments

I am an Aboriginal woman of the Kunngangji people of the Kura Kula Clan of Far North Queensland. I have lived and worked in many of the communities of Far North Queensland for a period of ten years and was therefore extremely excited that a project that focuses on these 'safe houses' was funded. In undertaking this project I have gained personally and re-affirmed the many good relationships I had developed over the years.

I would like to acknowledge and recognise the many women working tirelessly in addressing the issue of family violence in their communities. During the nine months of conducting the project there were up to twenty-seven deaths in communities (twenty of which were in one community alone), across the Cape, Gulf and Torres Strait, that I was aware of. Death in this proportion has a severe impact on the quality of work being delivered, as the deliverers of services are often tired as continual grief for the loss is overwhelming. This number of deaths causes communities to be in a constant state of grieving with little or no reprieve. *This is a major factor affecting service delivery by these agencies. Death and the associated grieving processes are a major part of the environment within which they must work.*

Thank you to all the communities who opened their doors and created many valuable opportunities for research and learning to make this project a success.

A special thanks to all members of the Project Reference Group for your guidance, support and dedication to the project as a whole.

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Bettina Rosser
Project Officer

<u>COMMUNITY</u>	<u>SAAP SERVICE</u>
PALM ISLAND	Kootana Women's Centre
YARRABAH	Yarrabah Women's Shelter
DOOMADGEE	Maguwa Ngutharra
THURSDAY ISLAND	Lena Passi
BAMAGA	Northern Peninsula Area Women's Shelter
NAPRANUM	Druamalon
AURUKUN	Ma'Aathan Women's Shelter
LOCKHART RIVER	Pytham Women's Shelter
PORMPURAAW	Maanchangk Women's Shelter
KOWANYAMA	Kowanyama Women's Shelter
HOPEVALE	Hopevale Women's Shelter
MORNINGTON ISLAND	Yuenmanda Women's Shelter

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Sustainable Service Responses to Family Violence in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in North Queensland was a 12 month action research project funded by the Australian Government under the National Homelessness Strategy.

The project aimed to:

- document the unique models of service delivery operating in remote communities;
- explore the strengths and weaknesses of the existing service responses; and
- make recommendations around developing sustainable service responses for the future.

The project involved twelve Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) funded services across North Queensland. The services are located at Aurukun, Mornington Island, Kowanyama, Doomadgee, Pormpuraaw, Bamaga, Thursday Island, Lockhart River, Hopevale, Yarrabah and Palm Island.

The project also aimed to deliver some tangible benefits to communities throughout its implementation. This included training, assistance with local issues and development of some resources.

Research Findings

Influencing Policy

- Service providers feel unable to exert influence over policy that affects their services and communities.
- Service providers can successfully influence policy when there is support and some resources to follow up and advocate their views.

Service System Responses

- All services were aware of the need to work with other agencies in the community and most of them were working together but with varying degrees of success (see Attachment 1 for service system maps).
- Remote Indigenous services need to be part of broader service system improvements and good practice developments. This needs to occur in ways that are relevant and appropriate for remote contexts.
- The role of the project officer through facilitating initial meetings with all key stakeholders in Yarrabah was critical to the development of a successful local service system approach to addressing family violence.

- Relationships with non-Indigenous services external to the communities appeared to be very limited.
- There are common elements in the field of work being undertaken by both 'safe house' services and the non-Indigenous domestic violence services and it is clear that both have a lot to offer each other.
- While 'safe house' services use dvconnect, the statewide telephone service, they experience some problems due to lack of awareness of some dvconnect staff around the context within which 'safe house' services operate.
- 'Safe house' services benefit from opportunities to network with each other and with other service providers and government agencies.

Resource Development

- Service providers need more locally developed resources and resources written in plain English for use in community awareness and education activities around family violence and to assist them in the management and development of their services.
- Video was an effective tool for communicating community concerns to government and has potential as a medium for resources for community awareness activities and organisational development.

Training

- The need for more and better training was expressed frequently throughout the project.
- Service providers were very critical of 'fly in, fly out' style training that was aimed at skill and educational levels inappropriate for their staff.
- Service providers found the Skills Audit Manual developed by the project's Training Officer an invaluable tool for them to assess their staff and determine training needs accurately.
- The need for 'safe house' service staff and management to obtain formal qualifications is critical in terms of accountability to government and ability to meet standards and the requirements of Industrial Awards.
- Training of workers on Cape York, the Gulf and the Torres Strait is vitally important to the sustainability of not only the 'safe houses' but for the community as a whole.

Industrial Relations

- Industrial Awards do not reflect the knowledge, skills and abilities of Indigenous peoples, particularly Elder Clan women and their role as 'cultural advisors' in services.
- The funding allocation from government does not factor in the need for the employment

of 'cultural advisers'.

- More flexible funding arrangements that allow for splitting positions (to meet the needs of multiple clans) and employment of 'cultural advisers' would benefit service providers.
- The Pitjantjarra Award in Central Australia could be of relevance to remote Queensland services.
- It is difficult for the management committees of 'safe houses', with limited experience in industrial relations and human resource management, to find their own way in this area without some guidance from industrial relations agencies.
- There are drawbacks with externally recruited staff, but they can be successful where they give more than one or two years of service, and where they are well grounded in local cultural practices and protocols, and both respect and enjoy the respect of the local community women.
- Where there are externally recruited staff, exit plans need to be put in place from their recruitment so that services do not suffer when they leave.
- Staff absenteeism continues to impact on the quality and availability of services.
- In terms of management of industrial relations issues there was no clear advantage to employment with local Councils or non-government organisations.

Organisations/Service Management

- Service providers are struggling to manage their organisations due to a lack of capacity locally.
- 'Caring for the carers' and addressing 'burnout' for staff and management committees are critical issues for services.
- Perceived or actual nepotism is an issue for 'safe house' services where key staff and management positions are seen to be tied to particular families or clan groups.
- Despite the challenges, the commitment, determination and experience of many 'safe house' service providers are strengths that can be built on. They are a part of the capacity of their local communities that needs to be strengthened and supported.
- Initiatives to support capacity building, such as 'sister community' arrangements and the Indigenous Community Volunteers show potential but had mixed success in communities.
- There is no 'preferred option' in auspice arrangements between Councils and community based organisations.

- It is essential that 'safe house' services enjoy a positive and supportive relationship with their local council.

Role of services

- The role of providing a safe place for women and children has broadened to a service and/or organisation that deals with all the social welfare needs for women and children. Many services are struggling with their level of staffing and funding to operate this expanded model of service.
- Most services also have 'quiet times' where demand for their services is limited and staff are not fully occupied.
- Many services appear to offer very limited case management to clients.
- Case management needs to be offered in a way that is culturally appropriate to each community and guided by cultural protocols.
- Services need to increase community awareness of their services and they need to be engaged in activities during quiet periods that contribute to the effectiveness of their services during the busy times. These activities would include community awareness activities around family violence.

Cultural Matters

- The Elder Clan women involved in these 'safe houses' are and have been the keepers of the cultural knowledge and power. They bring to the service the traditional cultural authority that demands respect from the men and has the power to influence the behaviour of the younger women using the service.
- There is a struggle to maintain cultural protocols and practices within 'safe house' services, especially when general service delivery practice requires that cultural protocols are broken.
- The research found that cultural protocols are broken and practices ignored in order to meet accountability requirements of government.

Accessibility

- There were a significant number of respondents (37%) to the project survey that indicated not all women requiring assistance were accessing services.
- The reasons for not accessing services included lack of confidentiality, fear of repercussions, shame, service practices, clan problems and broader community values.
- Some 'safe house' services have a misconception that boys over 11 years of age are not able to access their services due to a SAAP regulation or government policy.

Support for services

- Service providers' needs around support and information for developing their organisations and their practice in the family violence area are not being met.
- The project officer was able to assist some CROs in addressing unmet needs of service providers and communities.
- The employment of a Training Officer was useful in developing resources, exploring training opportunities and liaising with training providers. This role appeared to be a gap in meeting the needs of services around training.

Viability and Benchmarking

- Overall the review of service audits found that the majority of 'safe houses' were operating within or close to their budgets.
- Over-expenditure in the area of operating costs was a feature in most services for which audits were available.
- Over-expenditure in operating costs is being funded largely by savings in the salaries area.
- It is not possible from a desktop exercise to determine any common cause for the overspending.
- Few 'safe houses' meet the travel costs of women/families exiting the community (possibly as this is paid for through dvconnect, the statewide domestic violence telephone line).
- A significant number of services are not recording any expenditure associated with the provision of food to clients. If services were providing food, the very high cost of food in communities would be expected to be a major factor affecting their operating budgets.
- While there are considerable benefits to the co-location of services, there are indications that costs for some programs may be being passed onto the 'safe house' service.
- While information is limited, all safe houses appear to be funding workers in line with other SAAP services and relevant Awards.
- Given the lack of referral options, the isolation of the 'safe houses' and the scale and seriousness of the violence in communities, it is recognised that client need in 'safe houses' is likely to be at a medium to high level of complexity.
- 'Safe house' services need to deliver more than 'time out'. Some services are already achieving this, but others may need to consider different ways of delivering services.

Alternative Service Delivery Models

- A number of service delivery principles were identified through considering research and reports on work in Indigenous communities here and overseas. The 'safe house' services represented at the project workshop in October 2003 endorsed the set of 'universal principles' below:
 - Elders are the keepers of cultural knowledge
 - Wholistic service responses to heal individuals, families and communities
 - Local services must reflect local needs and use local resources
 - Each tribe or clan must have access to their safe house
 - Culturally based problem solving
 - Community solutions must come from community
 - Combine traditional and contemporary practice
 - Violent people must be held accountable for their behaviour
 - Social change must come from cultural activities
 - Form partnerships, work with others, whole of community
 - Social, cultural, physical and spiritual healing
- Service providers highlighted the need for whole of community responses and particularly some response for men who perpetrate violence.
- An alternative model of service delivery is the healing services recently funded by the Department of Communities. Healing services focus on three areas: practical assistance in a crisis; support to deal with the effects of violence or related problems; and support to recover spiritually and emotionally from the long-term effects of violence.

Recommendations:

1) The Department of Communities should provide additional resourcing and support for 'safe house' services.

This could be achieved through creating at least one "Senior Indigenous Family Violence Support/Indigenous Community Service Support Officer" position in both Far North Queensland and North Queensland regions and a Training Officer position specifically targeting family violence services in remote communities. Given the direction of service development the staff would need to have knowledge and capability around both women's and men's issues in relation to family violence services.

The positions could undertake the following duties:

- Support ongoing service development of family violence services in Indigenous remote communities, with an initial focus on SAAP funded 'safe house' services and the issues identified in this Report, including exploring alternative service delivery models
- Resource a network (see recommendation 2) of 'safe house' services and Community Resource Officers, including a network newsletter and annual network workshop
- Support the creation of linkages between services in Indigenous remote communities and non-Indigenous domestic violence services
- Foster linkages with key stakeholders including Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Program (RAATSICC), Queensland Domestic and Family

Violence Council, DATSIP, TAFE Queensland

- Support the development of better training opportunities for services in conjunction with appropriate training providers
- Disseminate and develop appropriate resource material for services
- Contribute to relevant initiatives in policy and program development for 'safe house' services and remote Indigenous service delivery

2) The development of a network for the remote Indigenous Family Violence services

The experience of this research project was that the networking opportunities afforded by this project have contributed to the initial development of a "remote Indigenous family violence service sector". The continued development of a "sector" is critical to the sustainability of these services. Services need a network where they can explore good practice, learn from each other's successes and mistakes, share information and resources and have input into policy and program development as a group. It is essential to overcome the isolation and lack of peer support of these services. The resourcing of such a network would be the task of the Services Support positions recommended above. Without the creation of the additional positions it would be difficult to sustain this network.

3) The Department of Communities should develop plain English resources for remote Indigenous services, or support the local development of resources, in particular resources to support community awareness around family violence and improved management of organisations.

4) Training providers, particularly Integrated Skills Development and TAFE Queensland, should improve their provision of training to service providers in remote communities.
If recommendation 1 was implemented this recommendation could be progressed through the Services Support positions and specifically the Training Officer position.

5) Government, at both State and Commonwealth levels, should investigate the potential of new models of service delivery that focus on wholistic responses to family violence.

A range of models for service delivery should be explored with communities, starting from a whole of community perspective that addresses issues and needs of women, men and children. The development of healing services currently funded by the Department of Communities should be monitored for learnings about future directions for service delivery.

6) More detailed examination of financial viability issues should be undertaken by the Department of Communities with a view to establishing funding and service delivery benchmarks for 'safe house' services.

Many of the 'safe house' services clearly have financial issues around over-spending in their operating budgets. The reasons for this should be further explored to determine whether it is a funding or financial management issue. Benchmarks should be established around levels of funding, both operating and salaries, as well as service delivery benchmarks, such as staff-client ratios.

7) The Department of Communities should clarify with 'safe house' services that there is no regulation around not accommodating boys or young men over 11 years of age.

Obviously there are other reasons why services may decide it is inappropriate to accommodate boys over 11 years. This is a complex issue which needs to be further explored with service providers.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

Sustainable Service Responses to Family Violence in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in North Queensland was a 12 month action research project funded by the Australian Government under the National Homelessness Strategy.

The project aimed to:

- document the unique models of service delivery operating in remote communities;
- explore the strengths and weaknesses of the existing service responses; and
- make recommendations around developing sustainable service responses for the future.

The aim is to share the project's learnings so that they are useful in other parts of Queensland and Australia.

The project involved twelve Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) funded services across North Queensland. The services are located at Aurukun, Mornington Island, Kowanyama, Doomadgee, Pormpuraaw, Bamaga, Thursday Island, Lockhart River, Hopevale, Yarrabah and Palm Island (see page 6 for service names and locations).

The project was also to consider the following:

- The community context each service operates within and it's impact on the service model;
- Viability issues for existing services and building sustainable services long term;
- Building Design of 'safe house' properties;
- Practical service delivery issues, such as the role of police and other agencies, cultural issues, industrial relations and training issues; and
- Current and future trends and how services fit into that future.

The project also aimed to deliver some tangible benefits to communities throughout its implementation. This included training, assistance with local issues and development of some resources.

The project was successful to some degree in considering all the issues that were identified initially. However, as expected with an action research project, the communities and service providers involved and the changing environment on the ground also shaped the focus for the project.

The community context

The term 'safe house' is used in this report for want of a better one, but through the project many women from remote communities have said that this doesn't describe their services accurately. Their services are either more like women's shelters or places of healing. It was hoped that through this project we could come up with a better name for describing services, but we didn't. However the name, like the services themselves, will evolve and perhaps 'safe house' represents one aspect of the more complex model of service delivery that most services have adopted.

The services on which the project focused cover a huge geographical area across North

Queensland and reflect twelve distinct community contexts. Although diverse in climate, history and culture, these communities also share some common issues and problems.

Many of the communities were established as church missions. Two were created as punishment settlements (Palm Island and Yarrabah). One was set up as a refuge for the traditional people as a result of a local gold rush (Hopevale) and another was as a result of an arrangement between a Torres Strait Islander mainland community and the local Aboriginal traditional owners (Bamaga in NPA).

The communities vary in their remoteness. Yarrabah, for example, is only 45 kms from Cairns, Doomadgee on the other hand is 600kms north of Mt Isa and Boigu Island is 135kms north of Thursday Island. Remoteness is also affected by accessibility, which is determined by distance, but also by the impact of climate, especially the "Wet", and the availability of accessible roads and affordable transport. When safety is at risk, transport, or the lack of it, can become a life or death issue.

Population size also varies considerably, from around 800 people in smaller communities to close to 10,000 in the Torres Strait. The number of clan groups in each community varies from only two to as many as forty, with a mixture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, traditional and historical owners. The mixing of traditional owners with other clan groups and the mixing of clan and family groups who do not traditionally/historically get on well together has caused enormous problems in communities and contributed to ongoing tensions and violence. The "insider"/"outsider" issue also complicates community management and service delivery, particularly where staff or management of a service are seen as "outsiders" in a community due to not being traditional owners, or being seen as someone "new" even though they may have been in the community for many years.

While family violence is the major issue contributing to the need for women and children to access the 'safe house' services, there are other issues affecting communities which must also be mentioned. These issues directly impact on the level of violence in communities and create the context within which the services are working.

These issues include:

- high levels of unemployment, welfare dependency and poverty,
- lack of local education above primary school level,
- difficulties for community services in attracting and keeping qualified staff,
- severe shortages of housing and overcrowding in existing accommodation,
- high levels of alcohol and substance abuse, and
- effects of individual and community trans-generational experience of trauma and abuse, including widespread apathy and hopelessness.

Taking just one example from this list, the severe lack of housing in communities means that the 'safe house' services struggle to meet the outcome of the SAAP program of assisting people to find safe and secure accommodation.

The communities and the 'safe house' services must be seen within the context in which they operate and that is a context shaped both historically and currently by colonisation. In his examination of Indigenous experiences of trauma in *Addictions and Healing in Aboriginal Country*, Greg Phillips lists the many stressors that colonisation brought to Indigenous people

and communities. *These included forced relocation and wholesale theft of land; the stealing of children, whereby they and other family members were forcibly removed from their families over decades-resulting in generational effects including the loss of parenting skills and social cohesion; direct genocidal practices such as massacres and mass poisonings; forced assimilation into an industrialised and technologically-driven market and society; and repression of Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices.*¹

The intent of naming the issues for remote communities is not to paint a picture of hopelessness or to blame White Australia for all the communities' ills. However it is important that it is kept in mind that the ongoing impact of colonisation is an important part of the context for service delivery in remote Indigenous communities.

Family Violence

The issue of family violence in Queensland was thoroughly described and documented in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence Report. While this report makes some comment about family violence, it doesn't seek to duplicate this earlier work.

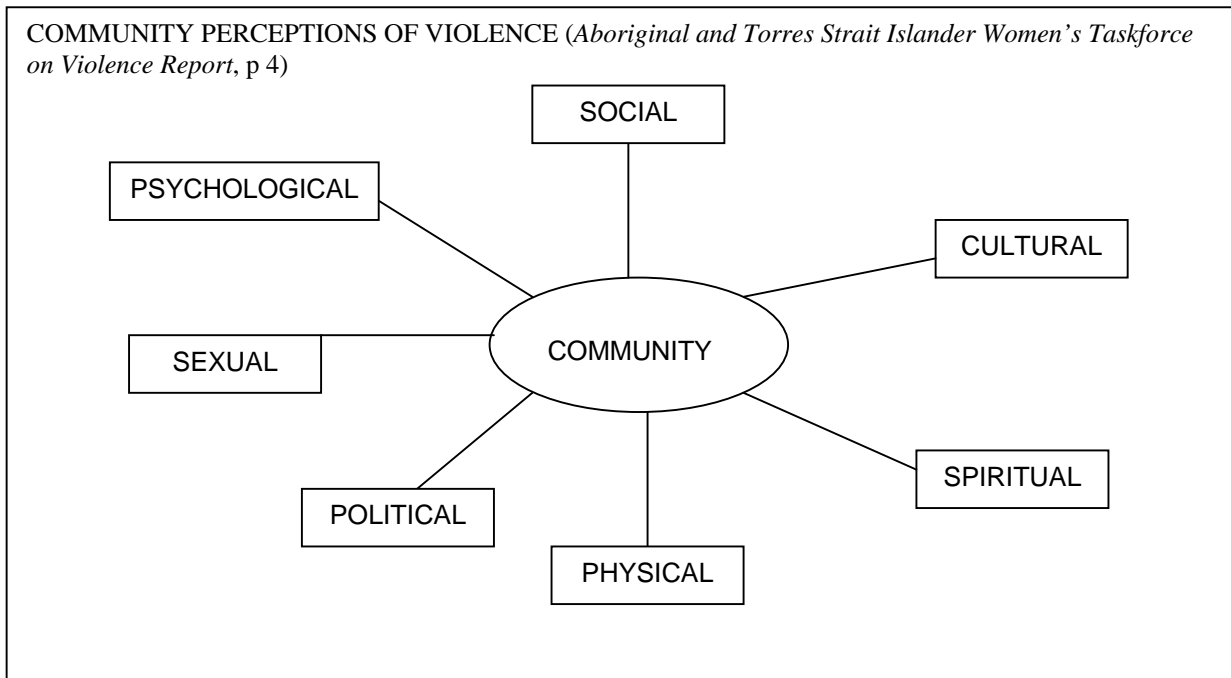
The project used a definition of family violence which is quoted in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report (Dec 2000). It comes from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission document *Tjunparni: Family Violence in Indigenous Australia*.² This includes the beating of family and community members, murder, suicide and other self-inflicted injury, rape, child abuse and child sexual abuse, incest and the sale of children for misuse by others. Family violence is not only serious physical injury but also includes verbal harassment, psychological, spiritual and emotional abuse, and economic deprivation. Family violence can apply to a broad range of family relationships. Perpetrators and victims of family violence can include, for example, aunts, uncles, cousins and children of previous relationships.

The diagram in Figure 1 below illustrates community perceptions of violence in Indigenous communities where the violence has many dimensions beyond the physical. This understanding of family violence obviously affects and determines the type of service response that is required.

¹ Phillips, G. *Addictions and Healing in Aboriginal Country*, Aboriginal Studies Press, April 2003, p 23.

² *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce Report, Dec 2000, p2*

Figure 1



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe that they must be an important and primary part of any developments in addressing their own issues and concerns. The success in establishing 'safe houses' in remote Indigenous communities in far North Queensland, under very difficult circumstances, has shown that communities are willing to take the step towards protecting their women and children from the violence.

Current Developments

Amendments to The Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989

In 2003 amendments were made to the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989* (the Act). The Amendments broadened the coverage of the Act beyond violence in spousal relationships (including same sex relationships) to include people in family relationships who are abused by their relatives, people in informal care relationships and people within intimate personal relationships.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have always had a broad view of what constitutes family violence, the broadening of the Act was still significant for these communities. It changes the legal framework they operate within and remote communities have had to consider how they can work within the Act.

Meeting Challenges, Making Choices

For decades there has been a lot of media attention across Australia on the issue of poverty, disadvantage and particularly family violence in remote Indigenous communities. Recently, within Queensland this attention has focused on Cape York in particular and there have been a number of reports, research and initiatives around the issue of family violence. Reports such as *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report*

highlight the growing and immediate need to address the issue of family violence in a manner that promotes self determination. The findings of the Women's Taskforce were confirmed by the *Cape York Justice Study Report*, published in November 2001, and this report also offered recommendations and strategies to communities of Cape York and to government to address a wide range of issues, including family violence.

The implementation of recommendations from both of these reports and a range of other initiatives, such as the Queensland Whole-of-Government Family Violence Agreement, has seen the beginning of major changes for Indigenous communities across Queensland.

In April 2002 the Queensland Government made a commitment to a comprehensive new strategy to tackle the range of issues confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the state. The new strategy, called *Meeting Challenges, Making Choices*, set out a number of priority actions, such as stopping alcohol abuse and violence, supporting community justice groups and building partnerships between the Government and communities to achieve real change.

One of the first strategies under *Meeting Challenges, Making Choices* was the introduction of Alcohol Management Plans (AMPs) for all mainland Indigenous communities, and some others such as Mornington Island and Palm Island. The AMPs restrict the sale of alcohol and the amount of alcohol that individuals can possess. Each AMP is unique to the community where it is developed and they vary considerably.

At the project workshop in October 2003, with a majority of the 'safe house' services, community members spoke of the effect of AMPs in those communities where they have been adopted. Most AMPs seem to have reduced the level of violence in the community and people spoke of how much quieter and less violent their communities were. As Ethel Singleton, Coordinator of Pytham Women's Shelter in Lockhart River, put it: "*Lockhart has really changed and it is a good place.*"

However, women also spoke of the need to be aware that violence is caused by more than just alcohol. In some communities, people have continued to drink but have moved further away from the main community area to outside the Council boundary. So violence and abuse continue to occur where people drink, but it is now further away from services or assistance. The general view at the workshop was that the AMPs are producing some good results but it is very early days yet and it is premature to think that all violence against women and children will disappear as a result of the AMPs.

In the short term the drop in the number of clients presenting at 'safe houses' means that these services are needing to rethink their service delivery and the reduced demand is at least giving them some space and time to do that. Although it is too soon to say what the long term impact of the AMPs will be. If they are as successful as is hoped, then 'safe house' services will need to be more pro-active in the down time and are able to change to meet the emerging new needs in their communities. An example of this occurring is in Doomadgee where the service is looking at doing more outreach to the place outside the community boundary where people are now drinking and where violence continues to occur.

Another key strategy of *Meeting Challenges, Making Choices* is major reform of community governance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A *White Paper on new laws*

for *Aboriginal community governance* was recently released by the Queensland government. It outlines the new model for Aboriginal governance legislation, which are being introduced in 2004. This report will not go into the new model in detail, but briefly, the new legislation means that, after a four year transition phase, councils in Aboriginal communities will have the same status as Shire Councils under the *Local Government Act 1993*. This is a major reform for Indigenous communities and it will impact on 'safe house' services in a number of ways.

As part of local communities all services based in Deeds of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) communities will be affected by the changes this new model of governance will bring. For services that are currently auspiced by Community Councils the change will be even more important. It will mean their auspice body will no longer exist and they will need to negotiate with new council bodies or make decisions about whether they incorporate themselves and seek to take on the funding directly. These will be big decisions for communities in the near future.

Commonwealth developments

Other developments in the family violence field at the Commonwealth level, include the impact of the recently announced abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) on the ATSIC Family Violence Strategy and the development of Family Violence Action Plans by Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS).

Healing Services

In 2003 the previous Department of Families (now Department of Communities) also announced funding for a number of healing services across Queensland to address family violence. This initiative holds great interest for 'safe house' services as it proposes a new model of service response to family violence that reflects a more wholistic approach. In fact, some of the non-government organisations that have received funding for healing services also manage the 'safe houses'. In the case of one of these organisations, it is bringing changes, for example, needing a committee which represents both men and women instead of just women. The experiences of these services will yield lessons for other services and communities for the future. In many ways the establishment of healing services will support the work being done by the 'safe house' services.

Conclusion

The impacts of all these initiatives are yet to be felt fully as most of them are in their early stages. The sheer number of initiatives is encouraging but can also be confusing. It is hard for service providers to keep track of all that is happening in their communities and in government and yet they need to be informed and involved in these changes. The overwhelming message for service providers is the need to be flexible so that they can respond to whatever changes occur in their communities. Of course the need for flexibility is not unique to remote Indigenous services.

Throughout the project as much information as possible was passed on to service providers and opportunities were provided for information sharing about a number of new initiatives. It was both exciting and challenging for the project to happen in a year when so many changes and new initiatives were beginning.

The 'Safe House' Services

The establishment of the 'safe house' services is a story unique to each community. And as has been highlighted earlier, each community has its own particular story and context. A range of factors, including settlement history, remoteness, population and community make-up, all have a critical effect on service development and delivery.

Details about each service are contained in Attachment 1 of this report, including funding and staffing details, maps of their local service system, their challenges and weaknesses and action plans for the next year around key issues.

Service capacity

The majority of 'safe houses' shelters operate as a communal house providing an after-hour service response at high demand times. The bed capacity varies from a maximum of 40 beds/mattresses to the smallest service of 9 beds. The overall number of bed nights per year is lower for 'safe houses' than for other SAAP funded domestic violence services (ie women's refuges).

Client group

The client group using the 'safe house' services are women and children who are escaping violence. Women and children may also attend the services to prevent violence from occurring or because they need time out. For example, they may be older women needing a quiet place for rest and a break from the violence in their homes. The length of stay for many clients is overnight, returning to their homes in the morning.

The number of children accompanying their parents or carers to the 'safe houses' has increased with children from extended families often being sheltered from the violence. It is not uncommon for one woman to be accompanied by up to eight children.

Duration of support

Support periods in SAAP data collection refer to the length of time a client receives support from an agency. It refers not only to accommodation of a client and may begin before accommodation is offered and continue after the client has moved out of the SAAP accommodation. Some clients may be supported but never be accommodated in the service.

In comparing support periods between 'safe houses' and a selection of 29 SAAP funded domestic violence accommodation services in other parts of Queensland, it was found that 'safe houses' on average had a higher proportion of support periods of either less than a day or from one to three days. The proportion of support periods in 'safe houses' that lasted from one to three days ranged from 32% to 95%, while in the majority of other domestic violence accommodation services, support periods lasting from one to three days accounted for around 30%-40% of all support periods.

Only two of the eight 'safe houses' for which data was available reported any support periods of 13 weeks or more (in one service this represented 13% of support periods and in the other it was 25%). Of the other SAAP funded domestic violence accommodation services examined, only four reported no support periods over 13 weeks. In the majority of non-'safe house' services, 10 to 30% of support periods last 13 weeks or more.³

³ National Data Collection Agency agency reports 2002-03.

Client referrals

The source of referrals to 'safe houses' reflects the higher level of flexibility required by safe houses. For the majority of domestic violence accommodation services referrals are primarily received through the statewide domestic violence telephone line or from other accommodation services. The primary source of referrals for 'safe houses' is through self-referrals or from the police and/or medical staff. Clearly this reflects both the difference in locations but also the higher level of visibility of the 'safe houses' and their accessibility to women who present to services without referral.

Voluntary beginnings

Most services began in the late 1980s to early 1990s with voluntary assistance and shelter offered by women in the community in their own homes. With the assistance of government staff and others outside the community, funding was sought so that more help could be offered and women could reduce the demands on their own homes and personal lives. However it must be noted that most women involved with the 'safe houses', whether as staff or management committee, have demands placed upon them outside of "work hours". With the small size of communities and with strong family and kin obligations, this is inevitable. As Fredericka Taylor from Maanchangk Women's Shelter in Doomadgee said : *"Some women come to our homes after work to talk to us. This is not a problem in our community, because we want to help them. Sometimes, women will come home with us for a feed and to build up a good rapport with our staff."*

This is also an example of where traditional and contemporary practice come together in the safe house services. Elder women who have traditional responsibility for caring and protecting and dealing with 'women's business' practise these duties through their work with the 'safe house' services. This can also create some tensions. The demands of running a government funded service, which involves case management, data collection, reporting requirements and responsibilities for managing staff and sizeable amounts of funding can seem a world away from traditional 'caring and protecting'. Services must manage staff and management teams, which combine both traditional and contemporary skills and knowledge and somehow manage to respect and value both equally.

Funding and service models

SAAP funding was made available in the mid to late 1990s for most of the twelve services. Services differ in the amount of funding they receive with staffing levels that range from 1.5 staff to 5 staff. The majority of 'safe houses' are funded for 2.5-3 full-time positions, and two services have funding for 1.5 staff and three services have 4-5 staff.

The 'safe house' model was originally based on a part-time service response around the busiest times of need in the community. This was the model of 'safe house' that was accepted at the time of funding for many of these services. While this model meets the basic requirement of ensuring women and children have somewhere safe to go to on a temporary basis at the most violent times, it does not allow for actually addressing family violence or effecting some lasting change in the situation. It should be noted that most SAAP funded domestic violence services fit this crisis response model and are not preventative domestic violence services. Most 'safe house' services try to provide more than a basic emergency accommodation response and many are involved in other programs such as child protection, childcare and cultural and social activities. Many services attempt to provide a 24-hour full time shelter model with too few staff, using volunteers and CDEP to top up staff

wages.

Lena Passi Women's Shelter on Thursday Island offers a service across the islands of the Torres Strait and is funded at a higher level than many of the other 'safe house' services. Due to the dispersed geographical locations of the islands this service has had to develop a unique service delivery model. Working with communities separated by sea rather than land poses its own challenges and difficulties. Lena Passi has incorporated outreach to the different islands and has outposted part-time outreach workers on some islands, in a cluster-island arrangement, in an effort to address local needs.

Many of the 'safe house' services also receive funding for childcare and children's activities and participate in the Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Program (RAATSICC) which operates in the far north of Queensland. It assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote areas to respond to the needs of children and their families in a culturally appropriate and wholistic manner. Services include long day care centres, children's activity programs and playgroups. RAATSICC has a highly participatory planning and review process through its two advisory groups, the Mainland Advisory Council and the Torres Strait Childcare Advisory Group. RAATSICC also includes a Remote Area Child Witnesses of Domestic Violence Support Unit. Peer support is integral to the RAATSICC program and regular meetings of the RAATSICC network bring service providers together.

Premises

Most shelters started out in very poor premises but over time about half have had purpose-built shelters constructed by the Department of Housing through its Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP). Another two services are currently working with the Department of Housing on the design of new accommodation. The Department of Housing's design process has become more sophisticated and inclusive of environmental needs, cultural practices of the communities and service delivery methods. The principles for service delivery that have been incorporated into the Department of Housing's approach include keeping families together, outdoor living, absolute security, private space with clients and specific community considerations. These community considerations include the need for separate space for different clan groups and incorporating cultural practices. An example is the inclusion of cup Murri pits (traditional Indigenous underground cooking pits). The Department of Housing works with services to design a building that will best meet their needs rather than adopting a 'one size fits all' approach. The Department of Housing's work in this area has been acknowledged as good practice both within Queensland and nationally.

Governance

Services vary in their management arrangements but all are managed either by a non-government organisation or the local Community Council. For most services this means a completely Indigenous management committee and staff team. A few services have one or two non-Indigenous staff or management committee members. Most non-government organisations managing services are women's groups, which means the management committees are women only. Community Councils on the other hand are dominated by men, so this management structure is a male dominated one. The management arrangement has an effect on service design and service delivery as explored later in this report.

CHAPTER 2 PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Establishing the Project

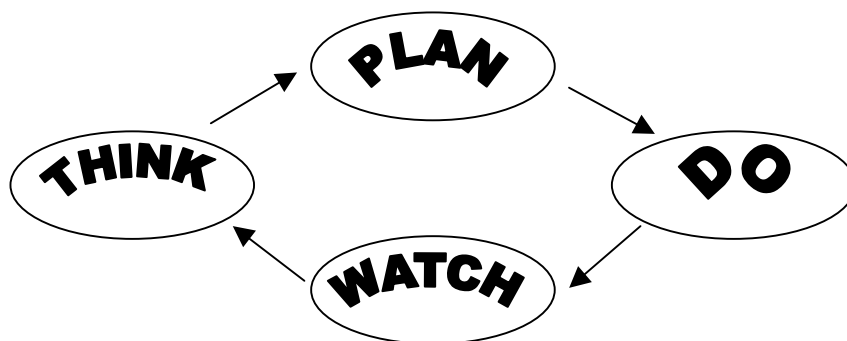
The Memorandum of Understanding between the Australian and Queensland governments regarding funding for the project was signed early in 2002. However a project officer was not appointed until October 2002 due to difficulties in finding the right mix of skills, knowledge and experience to ensure the project would be a success. The initial project officer resigned from the position in January 2003 and another project officer was appointed in February 2003.

A two day workshop was held in December 2002 with 'safe house' service providers from Doomadgee, Lockhart River, Bamaga, Thursday Island, Hopevale, Napranum, Pormpuraaw, Yarrabah, Palm Island, Aurukun and Kowanyama (Mornington Island was unable to attend). The workshop gave the department the opportunity to explain about the action research project and to begin to explore current issues in communities. Women from communities had a chance to share information with each other about their services, their history, what programs they offer, how they connect up with other services in their community and the challenges they are facing.

The diagram in Figure 2 below was used to explain the action research approach to service providers at the workshop.

Figure 2

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE



At the workshop it was possible to allow the community representatives themselves to decide how they would engage in the project, what their priorities were for the project and how they would have input into its management and direction. As a result of the workshop, priority areas were identified, a reference group was elected and some small change was made to the proposed format for the research. Protocols for how the project officer should make contact and communicate with each community were also agreed at the workshop.

Service providers at the workshop expressed reservations about yet another piece of research into their communities. Some people were concerned that it would waste people's

time, that they had done this before and didn't want to put up information again and find that nothing changed. After some intense discussion service providers decided that they would support and participate in the research project.

The Reference Group elected at the workshop is listed at the start of this report. It includes representation from communities, State Government (central and regional offices) and Australian Government and is made up of equal numbers of community and government representatives. Following the wishes of the workshop, efforts were made to include Indigenous government officers wherever possible on the Reference Group.

In order to ensure community input was maintained it was decided that unless three of the five community representatives were present at meetings, significant decisions about the project could not be taken. This proved to be quite a challenge until the last third of the project where community representation significantly improved. The decision to have a face to face Reference Group meeting in July 2003 probably assisted this process. Trying to meet only by teleconference is very difficult where people do not know each other very well and they are trying to stay informed and connected with a large and complex project. Overall the Reference Group worked well and by the end of the project, members were more active and involved. A sometimes frustrating aspect of this sort of project is that because of the time it takes to establish relationships and for people to absorb and engage with ideas, it is often only towards the end of the project that processes and people actually start to come together and perform really well.

A critical sticking point at the initial workshop was the project's proposal that there should be four focus communities out of the twelve that the project officer would visit and with whom she would work intensively. Many service providers felt strongly that *all* the communities should be worked with, not just the four focus communities proposed. After some discussion, it was agreed that the project could expand to work with six focus communities. These communities were Hopevale, Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw, Yarrabah, Thursday Island and Doomadgee. Because of concerns about not being involved or informed about the project, it was agreed to produce a project monthly newsletter to keep the other services informed

Project Methodology

The action research methodology was ideal for this project as the communities involved had expressed their frustration with seemingly endless research on their communities, delivering no tangible benefits for them. Through the action research process, the project was able to assist communities with issues that they had identified and then to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of any changes that occurred.

Indigenous Research Agenda

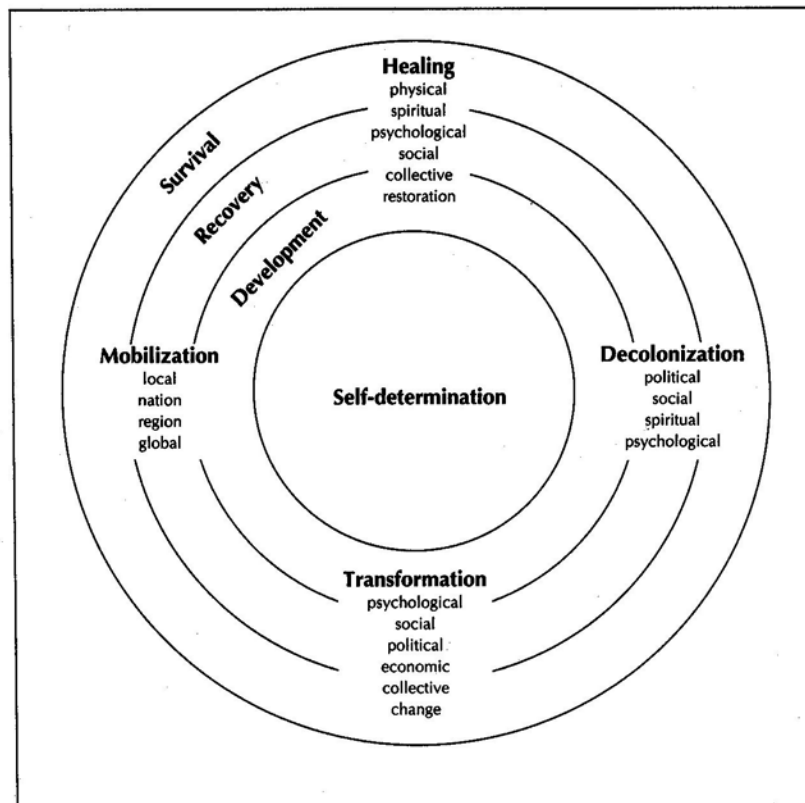
The recruitment of an Indigenous project officer with cultural knowledge and relationships with people in the communities clearly had a positive impact on the action research process. The practice of the project officer for this research project is grounded in the Indigenous research agenda, a research approach which emphasises reclaiming control over Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

The Indigenous research agenda situates research in a larger historical, political and cultural

context and challenges the supposed objectivity of much Western research.

The chart in Figure 3 below is a simple representation of the Indigenous research agenda. The chart uses the metaphor of ocean tides and incorporates the Maori equivalent of the four directions: the northern, the eastern, the southern and the western which represent the processes of decolonisation, transformation, mobilisation and healing. The tides are represented as: survival, recovery, development and self-determination. Neither the directions nor the tides are goals or ends in themselves. They represent processes, conditions or states through which Indigenous communities are moving.⁴

Figure 3



This approach affects every aspect of the research process and it is not an approach that proposes easy answers. It challenges the researcher to ongoing reflection on the research process and a responsibility to ensure that the research is respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful.

Working across Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and processes is never easy and reconciling the different cultural values, agendas and priorities of communities and government and non-Indigenous agencies was an ongoing challenge for this particular project.

Practical benefits

It was the aim of the project that the project itself would have positive benefits in terms of community capacity building through community representatives' participation in the workshops, the Reference Group and other initiatives that flowed from the project. As well as being involved in the Reference Group, service providers were also involved in

⁴ Smith, L.T., *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1999.

presentations about the research at the Indigenous Homelessness Conference in Melbourne in February 2003 and the National Housing Conference in Adelaide in November 2003. It was also planned for a service provider to present the video about data collection to the Information Sub-Committee of the SAAP National Coordination and Development Committee in August 2003, but at short notice she was unable to attend due to the death of an immediate family member.

At both of the project workshops, which were attended by all but one of the services, an additional training day was provided. At the first workshop SAAP data collection training was provided, as well as an opportunity to give feedback to the National Data Collection Agency about data collection for remote SAAP services. At the second workshop, training was provided in using the Skills Audit Manual that was developed as part of the training component of the project. This was one very practical way of contributing to skills development for services through the project.

Through the community visits the project officer worked with services on issues that were priorities for them. This took different forms in each community, from facilitating community workshops to providing training in case management. While in communities, the project officer was able to work with the community more broadly, including local councils, Community Justice Groups and general community gatherings. For this reason the project officer visited remote communities for at least one week so that she could meet with a number of stakeholders and run a number of activities.

All visits to community were facilitated by the local SAAP funded service. At most of the focus communities the history of the family violence response was recorded through interviews with founder members where possible. This enabled the project officer to chart the development of the community response over many years and to assist organisations and communities to retain important local history.

As well as the practical work in communities, the project officer was also involved in making connections at a policy level and feeding information between the project and a range of government and non-government agencies. At the face to face Reference Group in July 2003, stakeholders from the departments of Housing and Health, ATSI, Apunipima Cape York Health Council, DATSIP, Tharpuntoo Cape York Legal Service, Domestic Violence Resource Centre (Cairns) and the Aboriginal Coordinating Council attended a meeting with the Reference Group. The purpose of this meeting was to learn more about the project and to share information about current issues and trends that have a direct impact on services and the connections between the project and the work in which these agencies are involved. This exchange continued with most of the same stakeholders attending the second Cairns workshop.

The project officer also met with a range of government and non-government agencies which are engaged in working with these communities. The intention of this work was to ensure that the project was known and connected with existing initiatives and stakeholders and also to try and deliver some practical policy improvements.

Research methodology

The methodology used in the research included individual and group interviews, community

meetings and workshops. A survey was distributed to all communities to gather a range of views from across the community (eg clients/potential clients, council, other agencies) around the key issues and benefits of the existing model of service delivery. 120 surveys were sent out and 71 were returned which was a reasonable return rate. However some communities were much more successful than others in distributing surveys and having them returned.

These surveys were also completed by phone with two interstate family violence services to allow some comparison between the Queensland services and those in other states.

In examining financial information, a review of current viability issues for 'safe house' services was undertaken and some draft benchmarks were explored through a desktop process. The data draws on information from the most recent financial audits submitted to the Department of Communities by each 'safe house' service. A comparison of funding and staffing levels across both 'safe houses' and other accommodation responses for women and children escaping violence was also undertaken. Service usage data provided by the safe houses to the National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) was also considered. Given the limitations of a desktop process the findings are only intended as a starting point for further work in this area.

Of the twelve 'safe houses', ten audits were submitted for the 2001/02 or 2002/03 period. Two of the audits submitted were not able to be included in the desktop analysis. This was due to the lack of detail provided in one audit and the other service audit being bundled up with all the other services provided by the organisation. This resulted in data from eight of the 'safe house's being used in the audit review. Data on funding levels were available and considered for the total twelve safe houses. NDCA data was considered for eight of the 'safe houses' which had submitted returns in the 2002/03 period.

The two workshops in Cairns served as large focus groups and the Reference Group acted as a small focus group on specific issues. The two workshops were very important to involve all twelve services in the project and to provide opportunities for exchange of information and peer support for service providers.

Linking with Ongoing Support

The project officer usually worked in conjunction with a Community Resource Officer (CRO) from the previous Department of Families (now Department of Communities) so that issues could be taken up by the CROs who visit and work with communities regularly. This enabled the research process to be linked with ongoing support to address practical issues that services and communities face. The role of the CROs was seen as critical to sustainability of services as they have the ongoing task of providing information and resources to services, as well as monitoring their performance. The project sought to involve the CROs as much as possible, including a survey seeking their evaluation of the project and its value to services.

Priority Areas

The six research priority areas were agreed at the first project workshop after a process of identifying issues and challenges and then refining and prioritising until it was reduced to six key areas. The six priority areas were:

- Influencing policy
- Service system responses
- Resource development

- Training
- Industrial relations
- Organisation/service management

These areas were explored through a range of strategies. In most cases a focus community was the site for exploring one issue in depth, along with other community specific issues the services identified and general capacity building activities that were undertaken with all focus communities.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

As mentioned previously in this report, the research found that there was no one 'safe house' model as services had evolved according to their unique contexts. However the research did find that almost all services were involved in a range of activities outside the narrow function of the 'safe house' and the scale of activities involved was unexpected.

Six priority areas

The following section of the findings has been grouped around the six priority areas identified by service providers at the first project workshop. These were the areas that the community members themselves identified as critical to the sustainability of their services. They are: influencing policy, service system responses, resource development, training, industrial relations and organisation/service development.

1. Influencing Policy

Service providers identified this area as a priority as they felt that they were often at the mercy of government policies over which they had little control and which did not reflect their needs or the needs of their communities. Often policies seemed constructed with urban non-Indigenous contexts in mind and they struggled to implement them in remote Indigenous settings. In terms of service delivery, this included policy around funding for services and data collection.

In the area of data collection the project was able to confirm the view that a number of service providers had expressed for some time, that the SAAP National Data Collection in which they must participate is not appropriate for their services or communities. Service providers expressed the view that the data forms are too long, too difficult and do not reflect the reality of the context within which they operate. The forms are also seen as culturally inappropriate and put service providers in a position of having to breach cultural protocols in order to implement the data collection. Participation in the SAAP National Data Collection by the 'safe house' services is not very high so there is limited usefulness in the data that is collected. Service providers did not feel that the data gave them information that they needed and they were not clear why it was being collected.

'Safe house' service providers felt that they had told 'government' on many occasions of their unhappiness with the data collection but nothing had ever been done. The project used an innovative methodology to present the views of remote women's services at a national level by creating a video rather than writing a submission or letter. As a result of the video and the project officer's presentation to the Information Sub-Committee of the SAAP National Coordination and Development committee, funding was approved for a research project to develop and trial a more appropriate data collection form for 'safe house' services.

The success of this attempt to influence policy was due to the services having the opportunity to voice their concerns collectively and to have the project officer follow up on those concerns and organise the making of the video.

The research found that the opportunity for service providers to come together is critical for the development of policy influence. On their own most services do not have the strength to exert a lot of influence on government policy, although there are some very experienced and well respected community women involved in the 'safe house' services. Discussing and thinking about issues and hearing about experiences from other communities makes for more coordinated and better informed attempts to influence policy. If services are to be more successful in affecting government policy both locally and further afield they need more opportunities to meet with other 'safe house' services to discuss their concerns and hopes for the future and work out strategies to address these. And they need to have opportunities to meet with relevant agencies to raise issues.

Findings:

- **Service providers feel unable to exert influence over policy that affects their services and communities.**

- **Service providers can successfully influence policy when there is support and some resources to follow up and advocate their views.**

2. Service System Responses

At the first workshop all service providers mapped the service system responses in their communities. The project officer was also able to observe these responses in operation during community visits.

All services were aware of the need to work with other agencies in the community and most of them were working together but with varying degrees of success. The maps of service systems in each community are contained in Attachment 1 of this report. They indicate the agencies involved in responding to family violence in communities, for example, police, health clinics and Justice Groups.

Communities have already identified a number of issues that are barriers to coordinated responses. Surprisingly in such small communities, there is often a lack of knowledge about what each part of the service system does and what it has to offer. Protocols have been agreed in some communities, which are seen as useful tools. However agencies sometimes ignore agreed protocols. Relationships between key players, such as police and health services are critical.

State Police

State Police stations, ranging from two to four officers, operate in most of the focus communities.

The role of police in responding to family violence varied between communities and ranged from limited or extremely delayed responses to immediate and appropriate support. All eleven communities attending the first project workshop had named both the State Police and the Community Police in their service system response.

Services who have a good working relationship with the State Police have had to work hard in fostering these relationships. A number of factors affected the quality of the relationship between services and the State Police. These factors include:

- compatibility between the personalities and work practices of both the police officer and the service coordinator;
- the confidence and skill level of the service coordinator;
- a clearly defined and understood role for the police in the service system response;
- the length of experience of the police officers in these community environments;
- a willingness to work together; and
- a clearly defined and mapped service system response with protocols, entry points and referral procedures.

The constant turnover of police officers creates a challenge for the maintenance of good relationships between services and the State Police in communities.

Community Police

Community Police are engaged by the local Council and exercise varying powers depending on

local by-laws. Where State Police are present they have a supervisory role over Community Police. The relationship between the services, organisations and the Aboriginal community police is very different from that of the service and the State police, and requires a lot of trust and respect and often tests cultural obligations when the Community Police have family obligations to the perpetrator.

Again it was observed that this relationship was varied in the five communities, from a total lack of a relationship, to one where the Community Police are only used for minor incidents and reporting a request for help to the State Police. In one community the Aboriginal Community Police do not have any arresting powers and therefore cannot adequately respond to family violence crises. It was also stated in this same community that Aboriginal Community Police often become physically involved in the dispute due to cultural and family obligations. This places an additional burden and responsibility on the State Police officers.

The issues surrounding State Police and Aboriginal Community Police have been well documented in both the *Fitzgerald Report* and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report*. Both reports suggest a range of strategies to address the issues faced by both the State and Community Police forces. The issues raised in these reports need to be addressed as reform in this area is beyond the scope of the 'safe houses' and this report.

Links with statewide reform

The emphasis on service system responses is consistent with good practice in the domestic violence field currently, as well as making good sense on the ground. *The Domestic and Family Violence Accommodation and Related Support System Development Strategy* is a service system improvement strategy that is currently being implemented across Queensland by the Department of Communities. This Strategy is being implemented through local Regional Action Plans developed and implemented by Area Offices of the Department of Communities, non-government organisations and other government agencies. Integrated responses are a priority of this Strategy.

Remote Indigenous services need to be part of service system improvements and good practice developments such as the Strategy. This needs to occur in ways that are relevant and appropriate for remote contexts. With these remote Indigenous communities planning needs to be done at a very local level because of their geographical isolation. However their connections with nearby towns and major centres also need to be explored and developed further. As part of this project, services were able to focus on integrated service system responses in their local area in a similar way to non-Indigenous domestic violence services in other parts of Queensland.

Links with other agencies

At the first project workshop, many services observed that the connections with other agencies could be working better and indicated that this was a challenge for their services. Following the workshop a number of services went back to their communities and put into place some strategies to improve these connections. For example, in Pormpuraaw the service purchased hand held radios so that they could be contacted by police after hours and they also distributed their rosters to other agencies so that they knew who to contact when they needed the service.

Yarrabah was the focus community where this issue was most fully explored. The plan with Yarrabah was for the project officer to support the 'safe house' to trial a 'family violence agreement' in their community. A meeting was conducted with key stakeholders who were identified by the 'safe house' coordinator. The project officer and Nicholas Wymarra from the Cairns & District Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men's Group facilitated the meeting. The male and female joint facilitation was a critical part of the approach as both men and women were invited and expected to participate in the agreement.

The first meeting established people's willingness to participate and gauged the reasons why the community should work together. There was a lot of support and interest in working together at this meeting. As a result, the group went on to take the name of the Stronger Families Advocacy Group and to develop a mission statement, terms of reference and rules of participation during meetings. They also undertook an audit of resources available within the community. The Group is functioning well and the project officer was able to pull back from this work and leave it with the community to progress. The Group are now working on developing practice procedures and protocols that will be agreed and signed by all participating stakeholders.

At the second project workshop in October 2003 Lucy Rodgers from Yarrabah gave a short presentation about their Family Violence Agreement to other service providers. There was a lot of interest from other communities in developing similar agreements.

From the work of this project it seemed that the role of the project officer acting to facilitate meetings with all key stakeholders was invaluable. That role of facilitation, at least initially, focusing on building better service system responses, seems critical to these small communities. In order to ensure that the work of the project is ongoing, Community Resource Officers from the previous Department of Families (now Department of Communities) participated in the workshops in Yarrabah and agreed to continue the facilitation.

Relationships with non-Indigenous agencies

In order to respond effectively to women and children, 'safe house' services need to be able to refer clients to other services outside of their communities when it is appropriate. It is also important for the 'safe house' services to be kept up to date around domestic and family violence issues and current practice. It would be expected that the relationships between the 'safe house' services and their 'local' regional domestic violence service and nearest women's refuges and other SAAP services would be critical ones in their service delivery and practice development.

However, relationships with non-Indigenous services external to the communities appeared to be very limited. It was observed that the daily operations of all five focus services were confined to the boundaries of the community. Very little connection and communication with other services, in particular non-Indigenous services, occurred while the project officer was visiting these communities. However contact with essential service providers for this particular field of work, such as the police, the courts and visiting professionals, does occur.

Geographical isolation, lack of affordable transport, and the impact of the weather on availability of transport, all contribute to the poor interaction of the 'safe houses' with non-Indigenous services. Cultural differences around language, belief systems, the importance of family and different work practices also limit the formation of good working relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers, both internal and external to communities.

Many of the coordinators, workers and management committee members of the 'safe house' services indicated that their services shared more issues in common with other Indigenous services. In general the 'safe house' services expressed a preference to work with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and organisations external to their communities.

However there are common elements in the field of work being undertaken by both 'safe house' services and the non-Indigenous domestic violence services and it is clear that both have a lot to offer each other. It was evident during the project that there need to be opportunities for both sectors to share experiences and learn from each other. For the non-Indigenous services they can learn ways of improving their service to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, so that it is culturally respectful, sensitive and appropriate. For the 'safe house' services they can learn about improving systems and service management and be informed about the latest trends in the domestic violence field.

dvconnect

One of the key areas where there is a connection in the provision of service is through dvconnect, the statewide domestic violence telephone service. It was observed that though the communication between the 'safe houses' and dvconnect was limited, the 'safe houses' did use dvconnect more than other non-Indigenous domestic violence services.

However the use of this service can be difficult. dvconnect staff sometimes seem to struggle with understanding the remoteness of the services, their lack of transport options and the time, distance and cost involved in the limited options available, and the coordination required to have clients and their children safely removed and linked with a service to meet their needs.

Networking

Forums such as the two held during this project proved to be valuable not only for the 'safe house' workers, but for the government agencies and non-Indigenous services who attended. The October 2003 meeting of the 'Safe Houses' gave the workers and management committee members an opportunity to engage in discussion, share knowledge and debate issues with government and non-government representatives present. For example, the North Queensland Domestic Violence Regional Service (Townsville) employs an Indigenous outposted worker in Mount Isa who works with Indigenous services and communities in the North West. The workshop gave the opportunity for services on Cape York to ask the Cairns Domestic Violence Regional Service why they could not do the same thing with their communities. This may not seem very significant, but these services do not get many opportunities to come together, to hear of what other non-Indigenous services are doing and to have an opportunity as a group to articulate their needs.

Opportunities need to be created for the 'safe houses' to connect, liase and interact with non-Indigenous services.

Findings

- **All services were aware of the need to work with other agencies in the community and most of them were working together but with varying degrees of success (see Attachment 1 for service system maps).**
- **Remote Indigenous services need to be part of broader service system improvements and good practice developments. This needs to occur in ways that are relevant and appropriate for remote contexts.**
- **The role of the project officer through facilitating initial meetings with all key stakeholders in Yarrabah was critical to the development of a successful local service system approach to addressing family violence.**
- **Relationships with non-Indigenous services external to the communities appeared to be very limited.**
- **There are common elements in the field of work being undertaken by both 'safe house' services and the non-Indigenous domestic violence services and it is clear that both have a lot to offer each other.**
- **While 'safe house' services use dvconnect, the statewide telephone service, they experience some problems due to lack of awareness of some dvconnect staff around the context within which 'safe house' services operate.**
- **'Safe house' services benefit from opportunities to network with each other and with other service providers and government agencies.**

3. Resource Development

This area was identified as a priority by service providers as they felt that they did not have sufficient resources around domestic and family violence for community awareness and education activities. They also lacked appropriate resources to assist their organisations in their development.

A key problem with written resources was the language used. It was often too complicated and contained too much jargon so that community members, and even staff and management of services, could not understand it. More resources in plain English, or locally developed resources, are needed both for service providers and for the broader community.

The project was able to develop a number of resources, including regular newsletters. The newsletter aimed to keep people up to date with what the project was up to, especially those services that were not part of the focus communities. This report recommends a strategy for the continuation of the newsletter as it is an important way for isolated services to keep in touch and to continue to foster a sense of a peer support network amongst the service providers.

The previous Department of Families (now Department of Communities) had already produced a manual, *Developing Your Organisation*, which is aimed at management committees of non-government organisations. At a meeting with the Department's Non-Government Services Directorate the project officer passed on the view of service providers that they needed a similar resource which also included some Indigenous-specific information around organisational development.

Access to appropriate resources is an acute need in many communities. Service providers are isolated and do not have access to training, resources and the sort of peer support and exchange of ideas that urban services can take for granted. Since training is so expensive and does not come along very often, resources such as kits and manuals are seen as essential tools for supporting improved service delivery.

Some services make good use of what resources are available and are very skilled at finding what they need. For example, Lena Passi has an extensive resource library including videos and other community education resources. Kailang Dorante, Coordinator of Lena Passi, described locally developed resources as a "must" for 'safe house' service providers. They are better understood by local community members and participation in resource development is a way of getting the community interested and more aware about family violence and family relationship issues.

Another resource that was developed by the project was the video around issues of data collection for remote services. The video allowed women in one community to explain for themselves the problems they have with participating in the SAAP national data collection. It would be useful to further explore the effectiveness of video as a tool for exploring issues and communicating with government agencies. Video could also be used instead of written resources, or to complement them.

Findings

- **Service providers need more locally developed resources and resources written in plain English for use in community awareness and education activities around family violence and to assist them in the management and development of their services.**
- **Video was an effective tool for communicating community concerns to government and has potential as a medium for resources for community awareness activities and organisational development.**

4. Training

The issue of training for workers in the 'safe house' services and other community support services in Cape York, Gulf and Torres Strait has been on the communities' and services' agenda since the first 'safe houses' began.

The need for more and better training was expressed frequently throughout the project. This was one of the reasons that a separate training day was included as part of each of the two workshops planned for the project.

It was observed in a majority of the five services visited that very few of the 'safe house' workers have tertiary qualifications or have had quality training provided to them in order to gain the skills to do their job competently and confidently. There was a lot of dissatisfaction with the 'fly in, fly out' training model adopted by many of the training providers in far North Queensland. The requested training may be on the topic, but too often it has been aimed and delivered at a level of education, skills and experience that does not match with the 'safe house' staff members attending the training. Unfortunately this means that the training is ineffective and does not assist participants to improve their knowledge and skills.

As a result of this feedback and from the experience and observations of the project officer, the Reference Group decided that services and training providers would benefit from a skills audit tool. This tool would allow services to work out more accurately what training their staff need and what skill level that training needs to be aimed at. This will assist training providers to deliver more appropriate and ultimately more useful training.

The project employed a Training Officer for a six week period to develop the Skills Audit Manual and to conduct an audit of training opportunities for 'safe house' services. The Training Officer produced a Report which detailed training issues and available training.

All service providers attending the project workshop in October 2003 received training in the use of the Skills Audit Manual. The feedback from this training was overwhelmingly positive. Service providers indicated that they would be using the Manual to do skills audits with their staff and to identify their training needs. This tool will be available to other SAAP services and will prove very useful for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous services in assessing the skills and training needs of their staff.

The need for 'safe house' services workers to obtain formal qualifications is more pressing than ever with the introduction of various industrial Awards and practice standards which clearly indicate the required skills, knowledge and qualifications workers in this field should have. An increasing emphasis on accountability means that management committees and staff working in the services must be competent and confident in all aspects of the running of the 'safe houses'.

The lack of training opportunities means that most local people cannot hope to be qualified to apply for jobs in services such as the 'safe houses'. This in turn forces many services and sponsoring organisations, including Aboriginal Councils, to recruit professional staff external to the community to undertake sometimes quite basic duties.

Integrated Skills Development (ISD)

Several meetings were held with Integrated Skills Development (ISD) which is the organisation funded by the previous Department of Families (now Department of Communities) to deliver training to departmentally funded services across Queensland. Training is planned through a number of Skills Development Networks across the state. These networks are made up of local service providers and the closest networks for the 'safe house' services are in Cairns, Townsville or Mt Isa.

The meetings with ISD focused on the training they deliver to remote services and ISD did contribute some funds towards the training of participants attending the 'Safe House' Project workshop in October 2003. At the close of the project the project officer made a presentation to the local ISD Skills Development Network in Cairns about training needs in the 'safe house' services in the Cape and Yarrabah. Obviously the remoteness and the cost of travel for meetings or face to face consultations makes assessing training needs for remote services a challenge for a Brisbane based service such as ISD and for the local networks which represent the needs of remote areas.

ISD is already exploring ways to improve training delivery. They are trying to build relationships with key people in remote communities so that they can obtain information about training needs. They are also exploring a range of good practice strategies including guaranteeing that trainers spend at least one week in a community to provide training (no "fly in, fly out") and then follow up with individual support "on the job" with staff. Another strategy is to use the same trainers for subsequent training where possible so that relationships are established and earlier training can be followed up on later visits. The improvements that ISD are developing are very encouraging and it is essential that this work is reflected in future training.

Training of workers on Cape York, the Gulf and the Torres Straits is vitally important to the sustainability of not only the 'safe houses' but for the community as a whole. This research supported the view of the service providers that training was a critical issue for the sustainability of service delivery in the remote communities.

Findings

- The need for more and better training was expressed frequently throughout the project.**
- Service providers were very critical of 'fly in, fly out' style training that was aimed at skill and educational levels inappropriate for their staff.**
- Service providers found the Skills Audit Manual developed by the project's Training Officer an invaluable tool for them to assess their staff and determine training needs accurately.**
- The need for 'safe house' service staff and management to obtain formal qualifications is critical in terms of accountability to government and ability to meet standards and the requirements of Industrial Awards.**

- **Training of workers on Cape York, the Gulf and the Torres Strait is vitally important to the sustainability of not only the 'safe houses' but for the community as a whole.**

5. Industrial Relations

Industrial relations is an area of concern for many services and was raised as a priority at the workshop in 2002.

Some of the issues identified included:

- reflecting the cultural knowledge and position of traditional Elder women within the current SACS and CASH Award structures;
- addressing the conflict caused by paying younger women more than women who are their Elders and enjoy positions of higher authority within Aboriginal culture;
- managing workplace health and safety;
- the mix of paid positions and CDEP positions within organisations and Councils; and
- the advantages and disadvantages of Community Council versus community based organisations as employers.

Industrial Awards and employment of Elders

All twelve 'safe house' services operate under the Crisis And Supported Housing Award (CASH). The previous Department of Families (now Department of Communities) allocates funding based on this Award. The CASH Award levels do not reflect the important characteristics, knowledge and skills of Indigenous peoples, for example Indigenous Elder Clan women. The funding allocation from government does not factor in the need for the employment of 'cultural advisers', although a number of services require this. These services have had to find a way to employ Elder Clan women who can act in this capacity, but without proper acknowledgment and recognition of the importance of their role.

The project found that there is the Pitjantjarra Award in Central Australia, which could be of relevance to remote services. The Award reflects cultural duties and has some Indigenous specific features. Contact was also made with Indigenous services in Canada who shared their approach to appropriate reimbursement for Elders in community services. The Canadian services operate from a basis of payment for Elders for their advice and expertise based on the equivalent non-Indigenous rate of pay for expert advice. Yelangi Pre-school in Brisbane has also been funded for a position specifically held by an Elder, an 'Elder Coordinator'. 'Cultural advisor' was the term adopted throughout this project and specifically in the development of the Skills Audit Manual where this position was given recognition.

Flexible funding

It was observed that one focus community had successfully negotiated with the previous Department of Families (now Department of Communities) for the trial of a more flexible funding arrangement: 'two line funding'. Under this arrangement the service receives funding under the broad categories of Salaries and Operating but without further specifics, for example, around the numbers of staff employed and types of positions. This allows for greater flexibility for the service, in particular the employment of additional part-time staff and legitimising the employment of a 'cultural adviser'.

Managing Industrial Issues

It is difficult for the management committees of 'safe houses', with limited experience in industrial relations and human resource management to find their own way without some guidance from industrial relations agencies. Initial contact was made with the Australian Services Union about exploring some of the issues raised by remote Indigenous services and there was some interest from the union. However this research project did not have the resources to follow this up further with the union and develop a comprehensive project to look at these issues in depth.

The project found that a majority of the five services who participated as focus services were struggling with understanding industrial relations concepts based on a Western hierarchical value base, as this does not fit with the cultural value base of Indigenous people. Basic policies regarding industrial relations matters are limited or nonexistent in most services and require a great deal of work and development by organisations. For example, in the course of the project, work practices were observed that are not in line with workplace health and safety regulations. This is due to the limited skill and knowledge base of community people in management positions and managers of services and the limited support and assistance for services to meet these requirements.

Staff Recruitment

Recruiting and keeping good staff is a challenge for services in these communities. Services can struggle to find someone locally with the appropriate skills and qualifications. Recruiting staff from outside the community is a challenge when services cannot afford to offer attractive enough packages. In some communities there may not even be any accommodation available for new staff. Often services 'train up' someone only to have them 'poached' by other government agencies who can often offer better pay and conditions.

Recruited external staff members may bring with them the necessary skills and experience to assist in meeting government regulations, incorporation requirements and funding agreement obligations. However this comes at a cost to the community, where external staff may have limited or no knowledge of the cultural context of the community. And there is a cost for the local community women with the lack of jobs. Where externally recruited staff have been successful they have given more than ten years of service, have been well grounded in local cultural practices and protocols, and have given enormous respect to the local community women and in turn gained their respect.

A serious problem that was observed for organisations with an externally recruited staff member is that of dependence on the skills and knowledge of this person. Despite years of training and support to local community women, it was obviously difficult to raise the confidence, trust and self esteem for the successful handover of the responsibilities. It appeared that there were no planned strategies in place for these organisations upon the departure of externally recruited people. The cost to the services of the loss of these staff members will be enormous unless well developed exit plans or worker 'sunset' clauses in contracts are developed. It was observed that the 'safe house' services and sponsoring organisations clearly required assistance for the development of industrial relations policies and procedures that are grounded in cultural knowledge and practice.

It was also noted that staff absenteeism was a source of instability in the provision of services by 'safe houses'. Many 'safe houses' rely on CDEP as a wages subsidy and it was noted

that many CDEP workers were not highly motivated to attend work consistently. This affects availability of services by the 'safe houses'. This issue is not unique to the 'safe house' services but it is one that impacts on the quality and availability of services.

As mentioned previously in this report, 'safe house' services are auspiced by both Aboriginal Community Councils and non-government organisations. In terms of Industrial Relations issues there was no clear advantage to employment with either the local Councils or the non-government organisations. The issues around the two styles of auspice are summarised in the table in the Organisations/Service Management section below.

Findings

- **Industrial Awards do not reflect the knowledge, skills and abilities of Indigenous peoples, particularly Elder Clan women and their role as 'cultural advisors' in services.**
- **The funding allocation from government does not factor in the need for the employment of 'cultural advisors'.**
- **More flexible funding arrangements that allow for splitting positions (to meet the needs of multiple clans) and employment of 'cultural advisors' would benefit service providers.**
- **The Pitjantjarra Award in Central Australia could be of relevance to remote Queensland services.**
- **It is difficult for the management committees of 'safe houses', with limited experience in industrial relations and human resource management, to find their own way in this area without some guidance from industrial relations agencies.**
- **There are drawbacks with externally recruited staff, but they can be successful where they give more than one or two years of service, and where they are well grounded in local cultural practices and protocols, and both respect and enjoy the respect of the local community women.**
- **Where there are externally recruited staff, exit plans need to be put in place from their recruitment so that services do not suffer when they leave.**
- **Staff absenteeism continues to impact on the quality and availability of services.**
- **In terms of managing industrial relations issues there was no clear advantage to employment with local Councils or non-government organisations.**

6. Organisations/Service Management

Sound organisational management is critical to the sustainability of services and community organisations. Many of the 'safe house' services are struggling to manage and develop their services. Some are struggling simply to survive and continue operating.

Service providers have difficulty recruiting experienced and capable management committee and staff as they have only small populations to recruit within. And, as was outlined in the introduction to this report, these communities suffer the effects of high unemployment, limited education opportunities, poor community health and the effects of violence and severe alcohol and substance abuse. The widespread apathy and hopelessness that is caused by individual and community transgenerational experience of trauma and abuse makes recruiting volunteers to manage and support services particularly difficult.

Those people in communities who are qualified, experienced, interested, and in good enough health to be involved in voluntary work, are usually already committed to many organisations

and activities. They are also often personally caring for other family members who may be affected by violence, alcohol abuse or ill health. They may be struggling with some of these issues and need help themselves.

A critical issue raised by service providers through the research is that of 'caring for the carers'. 'Burnout' amongst staff and management committee is common when they are under so much pressure to meet the demands and expectations of community and of government. They operate in an environment where there is a high proportion of 'sorry business' occurring due to the high death rates in remote communities. Dealing with the grief and loss on a continual basis is overwhelming and has a severe impact on the 'safe house' services. In some cases workers and management are victims of violence themselves.

Another critical issue is the perception of a 'closed shop' nature of some services where one or two families are seen to hold key employment and management positions. This may be a consequence of not having a broad pool from which to recruit and preferring trusted family members to others with whom there is no relationship of trust. In some cases, cultural obligations to family and clan group may override merit based selection.

Despite the problems and challenges, the achievements of the management and staff of the 'safe house' services in establishing their services and continuing to offer services in often very difficult circumstances, need to be acknowledged. This commitment, determination and experience of many of the 'safe house' service providers are strengths that can be built on. They are a part of the capacity of their local communities that needs to be strengthened and supported.

Strategies to support capacity building

Some of the strategies to support building the capacity of services to manage that were explored through the project included 'sister community' arrangements, where services exchange skills and support between two communities. During the project two of the 'safe house' services, Palm Island and Doomadgee, had participated in 'sister community' initiatives with other Indigenous women's SAAP services. These two services had quite different experiences. One was positive and one was not very useful. It is difficult to say with absolute certainty what can guarantee a successful 'sister community' exchange. However the experience of this project indicates that it may work better when the following factors are considered:

- the two services have some sort of ongoing connection;
- there are clear expectations about what is required from the visits between services;
- both services have something to gain from the exchange of ideas and information; and
- there is a willingness to share information in a timely manner.

At the second project workshop a specific session was dedicated to services sharing with each other areas of innovative or particularly useful work they had tried. Examples of organisational models that worked were Lena Passi's experiences of changing their Constitution and introducing a range of strategies to strengthen their management committee, including half their management committee standing down each year, the creation of selection criteria and portfolios for committee members.

Another sustainability tool explored by the project was the Indigenous Community

Volunteers, a scheme which provides volunteers to Indigenous communities and organisations to assist with a wide range of issues. The project officer made a presentation to a group of remote services about the potential of using volunteers. However the requirement to provide accommodation to volunteers makes it very difficult for many communities to utilise this service. Prior to this project finishing, one of the focus communities engaged the services of the Indigenous Community Volunteers (ICV) to support the organisation's child care centre. Though the term of the volunteer was not complete, early observation showed promising results. The ICV organisational staff kept in regular contact with the focus community to gauge suitability of the volunteer. This scheme offers great potential benefits to communities and services in their development.

Governance arrangements

The project also explored the impact of governance models on the sustainability of service responses by comparing organisational management by Community Councils and non-government organisations. As with the area of industrial relations there is no clear 'preferred option'. There are strengths and weaknesses in both.

One issue for Community Councils is that social welfare programs are seen as outside their core business and can suffer against competing priorities, such as providing roads and sewerage. On the other hand, Councils have a level of infrastructure that small non-government organisations lack and which can make the latter more vulnerable, particularly when they encounter difficulties.

A brief comparison between councils and incorporated community organisations is included in *Making Choices About Community Governance: Review of Indigenous Community Governance, March 2003*. This research project doesn't seek to duplicate this work but focuses on the specific experience of 'safe house' services. A summary of some of the issues based on a comparison between a community council managed service and a community based organisation is below:

Community Council	Community Based Organisation
Advantages	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Financially viable to deal with industrial disputes. <input type="checkbox"/> Greater capacity to recruit external professional staff; eg able to offer housing as part of package. <input type="checkbox"/> Well established accountability for funds <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to utilise alternative funding to support the employment of staff eg. CDEP. <input type="checkbox"/> Greater opportunity to navigate the Native Title maze where necessary. For example where land is required for the construction of a purpose built 'safe house'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Staff have greater input into solving service delivery issues. <input type="checkbox"/> Service delivered by women for women. <input type="checkbox"/> Utilisation of Elder Clan women to exercise their cultural authority. <input type="checkbox"/> Greater ownership and empowerment of women in the community. <input type="checkbox"/> Quality of care given to clients may be more personalised. <input type="checkbox"/> Greater opportunity to implement community development practices on a daily basis.

Community Council	Community Based Organisation
Disadvantages	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Council of men making decisions for women. <input type="checkbox"/> Male councillors are often perpetrators of violence. <input type="checkbox"/> Local government functions take priority over social services. <input type="checkbox"/> High turnover of staff due to lack of direct support and direction. <input type="checkbox"/> Large workforce does not allow for direct input to decision making around service delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Financially not viable to deal with industrial disputes - highly dependant on government grants. <input type="checkbox"/> Limited capacity to offer staff salary packages that include Remote Locality Allowances or housing. <input type="checkbox"/> Limited empowerment opportunities for women to make decisions in regard to services for women. <input type="checkbox"/> More difficulties around the negotiation of Native Title unless women involved in the organisation are Traditional Owners. <input type="checkbox"/> Limited flexibility of funds for the employment of clan represented staff eg do not have control of CDEP to utilise as top-up funds. <input type="checkbox"/> May be seen as nepotistic.

Relationship with Council

Whether a service is auspiced by the local Council or not, it was noted from discussions with coordinators and senior Council management that the relationship between community council and the service is an important factor in the success of a service.

In one focus community this relationship was positive and well developed and this was demonstrated in the allocation of buildings, flexibility in managing a component of CDEP funds for female participants and the provision of housing for staff who were not local to the

community. This particular organisation also had the advantage of an elected member of council being employed in the 'safe house' service.

Several other focus communities do not have this sound relationship, to the detriment of the service. Examples of the effects of this include overlooked or delayed responses to requests for assistance or to undertake minor building repairs and demands for the payment of rates on 'safe house' properties.

The local council is part of the service system response through their responsibility for a range of services and for their leadership of the local community. It is essential that 'safe house' services enjoy a positive and supportive relationship with their local council.

Findings

- **Many of the 'safe house' services are struggling to manage and develop their services.**
- **'Caring for the carers' and addressing 'burnout' for staff and management committees are critical issues for services.**
- **Perceived or actual nepotism is an issue for 'safe house' services where key staff and management positions are seen to be tied to particular families or clan groups.**
- **Despite the challenges, the commitment, determination and experience of many 'safe house' service providers are strengths that can be built on. They are a part of the capacity of their local communities that needs to be strengthened and supported.**
- **Initiatives to support capacity building, such as 'sister community' arrangements and the Indigenous Community Volunteers show potential but had mixed success in communities.**
- **There is no 'preferred option' in auspice arrangements between Councils and community based organisations.**
- **It is essential that 'safe house' services enjoy a positive and supportive relationship with their local council.**

Other findings

In addition to the findings in the six priority areas, the research also identified some key areas that need to be recognised in this report. They are the role of the services, cultural matters, accessibility, funding issues and support for services.

Role of services

From working with the focus services it seemed that four out of the five services were operating beyond their means. These services seemed to be trying to operate a 24hr service with funding for only 1.5 or 2.5 full time positions.

The role of providing a safe place for women and children has broadened to a service and/or organisation that deals with all the social welfare needs of women and children. Activities and programs offered varied within each community. These ranged from sewing and cooking classes, parenting programs, cultural activities and support for women with health problems and victims of rape to operating as Centerlink agencies and female Community Development

Employment Program (CDEP) sites.

These services and organisations have also taken on the role of contemporary 'Aboriginal women's business' sites, where all issues faced by women in the community are discussed and addressed. This has evolved over many years of protecting women and children from the violence, through the support of Elder Clan women of the community.

Despite these services broadening their scope of service delivery activities, it was observed that most services also have 'quiet times' where demand is limited and staff are not fully occupied. The impact of the AMPs on reducing demand for services has meant that this is an issue across many 'safe house' services. It was also observed during community visits, and supported by evidence through the community survey, that there is a need for more awareness and education for women and the broader community on the issue of domestic and family violence. However community awareness activities were limited and appeared to only occur in conjunction with Statewide domestic violence activities such as Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month and Child Protection Week.

Many services appear to offer very limited case management to clients. The focus is on offering a safe place and a 'bed for the night'. Women and children only stay for very short periods at the 'safe house' and most services do not follow up formally with clients outside of the service. Service providers need to develop their knowledge and skills around case management so that they can offer women and children this type of support and assistance if needed or requested. The appropriate meeting of clients individual needs by the 'safe house' services does not have to resemble more traditional case management as found in non-Indigenous SAAP services. Case management needs to be offered in a way that is culturally appropriate to each community and guided by cultural protocols.

As SAAP funded crisis accommodation services the 'safe houses' would not be expected to function as family violence resource centres. However services need to increase community awareness of their services and they need to be engaged in activities during quiet periods that contribute to the effectiveness of their services during the busy times. These activities would include community awareness activities around family violence.

Findings

- **The role of providing a safe place for women and children has broadened to a service and/or organisation that deals with all the social welfare needs for women and children. Many services are struggling with their level of staffing and funding to operate this expanded model of service.**
- **Most services also have 'quiet times' where demand for their services is limited and staff are not fully occupied.**
- **Many services appear to offer very limited case management to clients.**
- **Case management needs to be offered in a way that is culturally appropriate to each community and guided by cultural protocols.**
- **Services need to increase community awareness of their services and they need to be engaged in activities during quiet periods that contribute to the effectiveness of their services during the busy times. These activities would include community awareness activities around family violence.**

Cultural Matters

An important characteristic of 'safe house' services is that most of these services and organisations provide services to a 100% Indigenous client base whilst under the management and direction of a 100% Indigenous management committee.

A unique challenge of these 'safe houses' is the struggle to maintain the cultural practices of the Clan, family and community. The Elder Clan women involved in these 'safe houses' are and have been the keepers of the cultural knowledge and power. This however has not been without great difficulty when service delivery practices require that cultural practices are broken.

These Elder Clan women bring to the service and organisation the traditional cultural authority that demands respect from the men and has the power to influence the behaviour of the younger women using the service. As Heather Saleh, Director of Services of Pormpur Paanth Aboriginal Corporation which sponsors the Maanchangk Women's Shelter, stated in an interview: *"The cultural practices practiced by these Elder clan women are the very essence of what makes these 'safe houses' unique"*.

The strength, connectedness and enforcement of cultural practices determine how a service will be provided. For example, in one service appropriate staff are employed so that the different clan groups within the community are represented within the service. The benefits of this arrangement are that the service has staff available who are able to navigate the cultural protocols for each clan group.

Kinship obligations and the staffing arrangements have always been a major challenge in the service delivery area because of a number of cultural practices. An example is the poison family cousin rite which limits communication between certain family members. This affects work on a daily basis and can also cause problems for the service Coordinator when staff rosters are developed each week.

There are also important cultural obligations associated with deaths in the communities and attendance at funerals. Although these may impact on the time available for managing the 'safe house' service, these obligations must be observed.

The research found that cultural practices are broken in order to meet accountability requirements of government. For example, a service may employ a young woman as coordinator as she has the necessary qualifications and skills. In order to maintain cultural authority, the service may also employ an Elder Clan woman, who has a poison relationship with the young woman, as a night carer. Culturally the younger woman cannot or does not yet have the right to talk directly to the Elder Clan woman. Discussion in relation to daily duties between the two becomes a dilemma, or this cultural protocol is broken and this appeared to be a common occurrence.

Findings

- **The Elder Clan women involved in these 'safe houses' are and have been the keepers of the cultural knowledge and power. They bring to the service the traditional cultural authority that demands respect from the men and has the power to influence the behaviour of the younger women using the service.**

- There is a struggle to maintain cultural protocols and practices within 'safe house' services, especially when general service delivery practice requires that cultural protocols are broken.
- The research found that cultural protocols are broken and practices ignored in order to meet accountability requirements of government.

Accessibility

The project survey was distributed amongst 'safe house' services, community members, Councils and other services. There were a significant number of respondents (37%) to the project survey that indicated that not all women requiring assistance were accessing the service. There were a number of factors contributing to this practice. The major contributing factors expressed by survey respondents being:

- **lack of confidentiality** - *"Issues of appropriate staffing. Confidentiality is an issue. Council wanted people to be identified by name"*.
- **fear** - women are scared and frightened; they fear reporting their defacto/husband to the police; they fear angry partners and the backlash from them and their family; they fear leaving their children.
- **service provision and practice** - sometimes people are not contactable; culture of the service and their rules eg having to call police when they access the service; there is no privacy to access the shelter; *"shelter is too small and women have too many kids and it becomes uncomfortable"*.
- **clan problems** - problems between clan groups, clan fighting, clan culture.
- **shame** - women don't want to be seen at the shelter as it might affect their jobs or lead to gossip in the community: *'shame if you are a councillor or someone in a high position, don't want to know what is going on in your household"*.
- **broader community values** - acceptance that domestic violence is the norm.

These areas are ones that 'safe house' services need to address both through their individual practices and through broader community awareness strategies.

A concern expressed by the 'safe house' services and women accessing the service is that of young boys over the age of eleven not being able to accompany their mothers to 'safe house' during a crisis. This issue was raised in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence*: *"Because a regulation prevents males over the age of eleven years being admitted with their mothers, these women must separate their children at a time where they need to be together for support"*.⁵

There is no such regulation for 'safe house' services and this misconception probably reflects the common practice in communal refuges, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, of not accommodating boys or young men usually over the age of 12 or 13 years. This misinformation needs to be clarified with 'safe house' services and also considered in the design of new buildings in communities. Non-remote services which have self-contained accommodation, such as units, will often, though not always, allow older male children to accompany their mothers/carers. This issue can be quite complex and needs further exploration with service providers and communities to ensure that women and their children, whatever their age, can be supported.

⁵ *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report*, page 165.

Findings

- There were a significant number of respondents (37%) to the project survey that indicated not all women requiring assistance were accessing services.
- The reasons for not accessing services included lack of confidentiality, fear of repercussions, shame, service practices, clan problems and broader community values.
- Some 'safe house' services have a misconception that boys over 11 are not able to access their services due to a SAAP regulation or government policy.

Support for services

The 'safe house' services, like others in the human services field, need access to information, resources and support to develop and maintain their services. As this report has indicated, these services do not have access to many of the resources and facilities that other urban services take for granted. Training, information and peer support are not available locally in many cases and services have differing degrees of access to visiting professionals or the closest towns or cities where these may be available.

A number of government and non-government agencies and initiatives offer some support and resourcing to services in remote communities but the research found that service providers' needs around support and information for developing their organisations and their practice in the family violence area were not being met.

The Department of Communities employs CROs who monitor and resource all of the 'safe house' services. These CROs have a vital role in providing ongoing support for these services. Throughout the research the project officer worked closely with the CROs for the focus communities and usually travelled with a CRO when visiting communities. CROs also attended all project workshops and assisted in group work and facilitation.

The project officer working with the CROs around resourcing and support for the focus communities seemed to work well in general. CRO feedback about the research project was generally positive with comments such as: "The project has assisted me as a CRO by providing me with tools and resources to assist my service, eg case management and skills audit." The project officer was able to assist CROs to work with services on some more complex issues and challenges, such as assisting the development of the family violence agreement at Yarrabah.

The CROs have a challenging job trying to resource and monitor services from a distance with limited contact when those services clearly need considerable resourcing and support to meet the requirements of government funding and also to offer quality services to their communities. The research did not find a problem with the skills or abilities of the CROs, but workload constraints meant that the CROs could not meet all the needs of service providers. It should be noted that it would not normally be expected that a CRO would meet all support needs of a funded organisation.

The Blueprint for Implementing The Recommendations of the January 2004 Crime and Misconduct Commission Report "Protecting Children: An Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care" recommends investigation of the creation of Senior Community Services Officer (Indigenous) positions and incorporation of a specific loading on the caseload

benchmark for Community Support Officers who resource and monitor Indigenous services. This project report endorses this recommendation.

However in the case of Far North Queensland and North Queensland regions of the Department of Communities, where all 12 'safe house' remote services are located, there is a need for more than one Community Services Officer. This would recognise the number of services involved, especially for Far North Queensland region where there are nine 'safe house' services and also take into account the issues around resourcing remote communities, such as time for travel to and staying in the communities.

In addition the project's employment of a Training Officer for approximately six weeks, indicated the value of such a position. This person was able to investigate training options, develop resources and liaise with training providers. Service providers' needs around training are so high at this time that it would be worthwhile to devote some resources specifically to addressing this area. For example, the creation of a specific Training Officer position at least in the short term (6-12 months) to establish some partnerships with training providers and ensure that arrangements are in place that will see appropriate training is made available and is taken up by the 'safe house' services.

Findings

- Service providers' needs around support and information for developing their organisations and their practice in the family violence area are not being met.**
- The project officer was able to assist some CROs in addressing unmet needs of service providers and communities.**
- The employment of a Training Officer was useful in developing resources, exploring training opportunities and liaising with training providers. This role appeared to be a gap in meeting the needs of services around training.**

Viability and Benchmarking

Clearly there are a range of issues that impact on the financial viability of any service. For the purposes of this report, the focus is on identifying key areas of financial vulnerability and commenting on potential benchmarks in funding and service delivery for 'safe houses'.

Deficits in operating expenditure

Overall the review of the eight audits provided to the Department of Communities found that the majority of 'safe houses' were operating within or close to their budgets. Some 'safe houses' were recording under expenditure of their grants, with the highest being savings of \$61,480. A few services were also recording over expenditure with operating losses of \$10,000- \$27,000.

It is of concern that even amongst the services recording surpluses, five of these eight services had overspent in their operating budgets. This was often possible due to savings in salaries as a result of staff vacancies. One service had savings of over \$110,000 in salaries, but had a total deficit of \$10,000. In effect the service had spent an additional \$120,000 in operating, over and above their funding allocation.

This trend is quite different to the results found in the 2002 viability and benchmarking process within SAAP services across Queensland that identified that most services at that

time (not including 'safe houses') were experiencing deficits in relation to salaries rather than operating expenditure.

The areas of greatest operating expenditure are:

- Administration - administration costs range from \$7,000 to \$42,000 and do not appear to reflect any identifiable factors. For example the highest level of administration spending is from a service close to a major city, while the lowest is from a geographically isolated island.
- Total Property and Energy - expenditure ranges from \$2,195 to \$20,567, again with little clear indication of the reasons for the variation.
- Travel and Training - for most services there is a consistently high level of expenditure for transport and accommodation for staff ranging from \$950 to \$23,000 with most averaging around \$4000- \$7000.

In the SAAP wide benchmarking process 24 hour communal refuges were benchmarked at operating funding of \$35,000. It is clear from the audits of the 'safe houses' that many of them are operating well above this benchmark amount. Even if the operating funding benchmark for 'safe houses' was based on the \$35,000 plus the remote index adjustment of an additional 10% this would not address the current over-spending in this area.

Client Support Costs

The review of audits showed that few 'safe houses' have spent funds on travel costs of women/families exiting the community. This may be because this is generally paid for through dvconnect, the statewide domestic violence telephone line. The audits also showed that a number of services recorded no costs associated with the provision of food to clients, while three services recorded food costs of around \$7000. The very high cost of food in communities would be expected to be a major factor affecting their operating budgets. However this is not the case for most services.

Co-located services

It is recognised that a number of 'safe houses' are either co-located with other services or auspice other programs funded by a range of government agencies. It appears from the level of funding of some of the other programs funded by the Department of Communities that a salaries or staffing component may not be allocated for these programs. This may indicate that basic infrastructure costs and service coordination for non-SAAP programs/services are being met by the 'safe house'. While there are considerable benefits to the co-location of services the costs that may be passed onto the 'safe house' need to be considered.

Staffing

Staffing levels vary across the 'safe houses' ranging from 1.5 staff to 5 staff. Most services appear to have a coordinator position and a number of support workers but only four services appear to have any administration/book keeper positions.

As stated earlier in this report, it is important to acknowledge the cultural components of service delivery. In a number of services Elder women may be employed under other job descriptions, yet be fulfilling the role of providing cultural advice to the service. The role of cultural advisers within the 'safe house' model is an important consideration for creating staffing benchmarks for 'safe house' services. In some communities it may also be important that there are provisions to ensure representation of different clan groups from the community in the safe house service.

At a minimum, the 'safe house' services should be funded for 2.75 workers, made up of a coordinator, 1.5 support workers and 0.25 administration staff. All services should have an administration salary component in their funding. Where required, funding should also be made available for a cultural advisor position. It should be the decision of each 'safe house' service as to whether they need to split positions to allow representation of different clan groups.

This staffing benchmark could be varied where the 'safe house' forms part of a bigger service response and other support is available. However where the service stands alone it seems unsustainable to fund services with 1.5 staff. The higher staffing level would enable services to meet the complex needs of clients and ensure that case management is undertaken with clients. For safety reasons services should consider the employment of two workers on evening shifts, or have an on-call arrangement, when the 'safe house' is open.

Given the current levels of salary underspending in many of the 'safe house' services, the staff recruitment and retention issues would need to be addressed before additional positions were created.

Salary and penalties

While information is limited, all safe houses appear to be funding workers in line with other SAAP services and the relevant Awards.

It is recognised that there are difficulties in attracting and keeping experienced staff in remote communities. Funding for an annual rural and remote bonus payment could be considered. Alternatively, services could be funded so that they could simply offer a higher salary where necessary and appropriate.

Financial Summary

There are a number of areas of financial viability that require further examination, but perhaps the most critical is the area of overspending in operating expenditure.

It is not possible from a desktop exercise to determine any common cause for this overspending. Some contributing causes may be the higher cost of living in remote communities and the greater need for travel for staff. It may be that the overspending is due to mismanagement of funds. This is an issue that warrants further detailed attention as the levels of overspending could pose serious problems for services if they did not have

savings in salaries to compensate. In any case salary savings are not a sustainable or beneficial way to fund operating costs. They indicate difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff and potential gaps in service delivery to clients due to lack of staff.

Service Outputs

This project identified a range of issues and complexities facing the provision of services within remote communities and these need to be taken into account when considering benchmarks for service outputs. Given the lack of referral options, the isolation of the 'safe houses' and the scale and seriousness of the violence in communities, it is recognised that the client need for 'safe houses' would more likely to be at a medium to high level of complexity.

The brief nature of most women's involvement with the 'safe house' does not necessarily indicate that the presenting clients do not have complex needs. This may be reflective of the service being seen as just a safe place only for crisis times. Some clients may have a high level of complex needs that are not being addressed. The client may not expect to receive support to address issues, seeing the safe house just as 'time out' from the violence.

'Safe house' services need to deliver more than 'time out'. Some services are already achieving this, but some others may need to consider different ways of delivering services. Services not currently undertaking any outreach or follow up with clients should consider the integration of an outreach component within their current 'safe house' model.

The SAAP output benchmarks developed in 2002 for communal shelters (not staffed 24 hours) could be a useful starting point for negotiation with 'safe houses'. That is one worker (full time equivalent) to five women (families) escaping domestic violence. The large size of family groupings would need to be taken into account, and also the amount of support offered to children by the 'safe house' services. Given the relatively small size of 'safe house' services, it would be expected that 50% of each coordinator's time would be in direct client support and case management.

Findings

- Overall the review of service audits found that the majority of 'safe houses' were operating within or close to their budgets.
- Over-expenditure in the area of operating costs was a feature in most services for which audits were available.
- Over-expenditure in operating costs is being funded largely by savings in the salaries area.
- It is not possible from a desktop exercise to determine any common cause for the overspending.
- Few 'safe houses' meet the travel costs of women/families exiting the community (possibly as this is paid for through dvconnect, the statewide domestic violence telephone line).
- A significant number of services are not recording any expenditure associated with the provision of food to clients. If services were providing food, the very high cost of food in communities would be expected to be a major factor affecting their operating budgets.
- While there are considerable benefits to the co-location of services, there are indications that costs for some programs may be being passed onto the 'safe house'

service.

- While information is limited, all safe houses appear to be funding workers in line with other SAAP services and relevant Awards.
- Given the lack of referral options, the isolation of the 'safe houses' and the scale and seriousness of the violence in communities, it is recognised that client need in 'safe houses' is likely to be at a medium to high level of complexity.
- 'Safe house' services need to deliver more than 'time out'. Some services are already achieving this, but others may need to consider different ways of delivering services.

Alternative Service Delivery Models for SAAP Funded Family Violence Services

This project did not develop a new model of service delivery although it was able to explore this area and highlight some current trends and key characteristics of potential new models.

Universal Principles

Despite their unique models the 'safe house' services represented at the project workshop in October 2003 were able to endorse a set of 'universal principles' that should guide service delivery in their communities. These principles were identified through considering research and reports on work in Indigenous communities here and overseas.

The 'universal principles' identified by this research are:

- Elders are the keepers of cultural knowledge
- Wholistic service responses to heal individuals, families and communities
- Local services must reflect local needs and use local resources
- Each tribe or clan must have access to their safe house
- Culturally based problem solving
- Community solutions must come from community
- Combine traditional and contemporary practice
- Violent people must be held accountable for their behaviour
- Social change must come from cultural activities
- Form partnerships, work with others, whole of community
- Social, cultural, physical and spiritual healing

These principles were only introduced at the workshop but the workshop participants clearly found them appropriate and useful. They are a useful starting point for Indigenous service design and delivery and could help inform future development of service delivery models.

New directions

Throughout the project there was frequent discussion by service providers of the need for whole of community responses and particularly some response for men who perpetrate violence. This is obviously the direction that Indigenous communities are trying to take. However there are very few examples of services successfully operating within this framework as yet.

Maguwa Nguthurra, at Doomadgee, took the opportunity of the final project workshop to design their 'ideal' model which was quite different to a 'safe house' model. The Doomadgee model is presented below as it summarises many of the functions and responses that were

identified by other service providers as desirable. For example it links the crisis accommodation for women and children with a whole of community response which includes community education, a men's group, a women's focus group, outreach to men, women and children and emergency accommodation for children who are neglected. It represents the scale of response that many service providers identified as essential to respond to family violence and it places the 'safe house' for women and children as part of a bigger whole-of-community response. This includes an emphasis on assistance and support, including support for perpetrators of violence to address their violence.

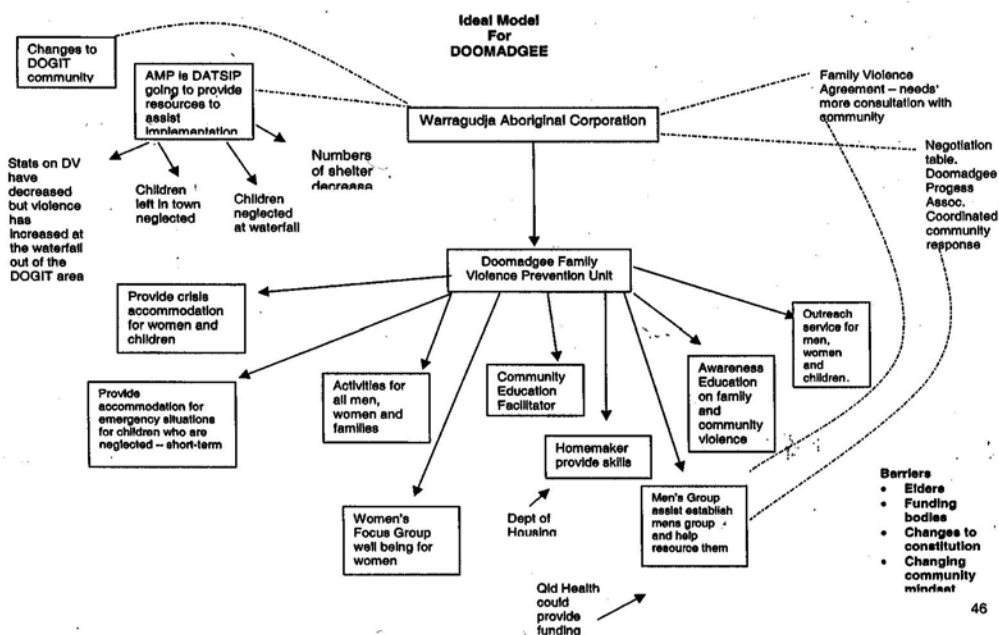


FIGURE 4

Healing Services

Another alternative model of service delivery is the healing services recently funded by the Department of Communities. At present these healing services are establishing themselves or have only recently begun service delivery. It will be useful to monitor their development and assess their applicability for other communities in remote areas. The healing service model is not a 'one size fits all' approach. The model is expected to differ in each community to reflect local needs. However it is expected to focus on three areas: practical assistance in a crisis; support to deal with the effects of violence or related problems; and support to recover spiritually and emotionally from the long-term effects of violence.

The target group for the healing services is individuals and families, including women and men and children who are affected by family violence, or who are victims of crime, or experiencing a broad range of other problems that may contribute to violence in the community. These problems include intoxication, gambling or issues related to historical/cultural dispossession.

A specific feature of the healing service model is an intensive start up phase to build local capacity, develop policies and protocols and foster community networks. This incorporation of capacity building into the establishment of the healing services is a particular strength of this model which is not about the model of service delivery, but about a model for funding of

services.

Findings

- **The 'universal principles' identified by this research are:**
 - **Elders are the keepers of cultural knowledge**
 - **Wholistic service responses to heal individuals, families and communities**
 - **Local services must reflect local needs and use local resources**
 - **Each tribe or clan must have access to their safe house**
 - **Culturally based problem solving**
 - **Community solutions must come from community**
 - **Combine traditional and contemporary practice**
 - **Violent people must be held accountable for their behaviour**
 - **Social change must come from cultural activities**
 - **Form partnerships, work with others, whole of community**
 - **Social, cultural, physical and spiritual healing**
- **Service providers highlighted the need for whole of community responses and particularly some response for men who perpetrate violence.**
- **An alternative model of service delivery is the healing services recently funded by the Department of Communities. Healing services focus on three areas: practical assistance in a crisis; support to deal with the effects of violence or related problems; and support to recover spiritually and emotionally from the long-term effects of violence.**

CHAPTER 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

It is clear that the 'safe house' services are evolving as are responses to family violence in remote Indigenous communities in general. Government responses are also changing with an increasing emphasis on solving problems in partnership with communities, coming up with practical solutions that will work and cutting unnecessary 'red tape'.

This report recognises the need for community capacity building in remote Indigenous communities and the need for whole of government responses to issues such as family violence. Obviously these broad issues affect the sustainability of services such as the 'safe houses'. However this report's recommendations will focus on practical and immediate solutions to the critical problems currently limiting the effectiveness and sustainability of service responses to family violence in remote Indigenous communities in Far North Queensland.

This report makes no apologies for recommending that, at this time, priority for new resources should go to support for existing direct service delivery rather than new or increased direct service delivery. At this stage this is the most critical need for services to be sustainable. More funds are certainly needed in some communities for increased staff and operating costs, and to establish more wholistic service responses such as healing services. However at this time, with services' management and staff struggling to deliver effective services with what they have, additional resources, without additional support for management and staff, could be counterproductive. Services need additional support and resources to consolidate what they have and what they do well, address their weaknesses and then carry out some ongoing planning as communities around what their service needs are in relation to family violence.

As the report has already pointed out, there are a number of initiatives already underway through the Australian Government and through DATSIP at a State level that are looking at better responses to family violence. It is essential that the implementation of the recommendations below takes place in connection with any initiatives that are also addressing family violence in these communities. Given the number of changes underway in communities, it is also essential that the implementation of these recommendations remain flexible and able to adjust to the changing conditions on the ground.

Recommendations

- 1. The Department of Communities should provide additional resourcing and support for 'safe house' services.**

This could be achieved through creating at least one "Senior Indigenous Family Violence Support/Indigenous Community Service Support Officer" position in both Far North Queensland and North Queensland regions and a Training Officer position specifically targeting family violence services in remote communities. Given the direction of service development the staff would need to have knowledge and capability around both women's and men's issues in relation to family violence services.

The positions could undertake the following duties:

- Support ongoing service development of family violence services in Indigenous remote communities, with an initial focus on SAAP funded 'safe house' services and the issues identified in this Report, including exploring alternative service delivery models
- Resource a network (see recommendation 2) of 'safe house' services and Community Resource Officers, including a network newsletter and annual network workshop
- Support the creation of linkages between services in Indigenous remote communities and non-Indigenous domestic violence services
- Foster linkages with key stakeholders including Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Program (RAATSICC), Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Council, DATSIP, TAFE Queensland
- Support the development of better training opportunities for services in conjunction with appropriate training providers
- Disseminate and develop appropriate resource material for services
- Contribute to relevant initiatives in policy and program development for 'safe house' services and remote Indigenous service delivery

2. The development of a network for the remote Indigenous Family Violence services

The experience of this research project was that the networking opportunities afforded by this project have contributed to the initial development of a "remote Indigenous family violence service sector". The continued development of a "sector" is critical to the sustainability of these services. Services need a network where they can explore good practice, learn from each other's successes and mistakes, share information and resources and have input into policy and program development as a group. It is essential to overcome the isolation and lack of peer support of these services. The resourcing of such a network would be the task of the Services Support positions recommended above. Without the creation of the additional positions it would be difficult to sustain this network.

3. The Department of Communities should develop plain English resources for remote Indigenous services, in particular resources to support community awareness around family violence and improved management of organisations.

4. Training providers, particularly Integrated Skills Development and TAFE Queensland, should improve their provision of training to service providers in remote communities.

If recommendation 1 was implemented this recommendation could be progressed through the Services Support positions and specifically the Training Officer position.

5. Government, at both State and Commonwealth levels, should investigate the potential of new models of service delivery that focus on wholistic responses to family violence.

A range of models for service delivery should be explored with communities, starting from a whole of community perspective that addresses issues and needs of women, men and children. The development of healing services currently funded by the Department of Communities should be monitored for learnings about future directions for service delivery.

- 6. More detailed examination of financial viability issues should be undertaken by the Department of Communities with a view to establishing funding and service delivery benchmarks for 'safe house' services.**

Many of the 'safe house' services clearly have financial issues around over-spending in their operating budgets. The reasons for this should be further explored to determine whether it is a funding or financial management issue. Benchmarks should be established around levels of funding, both operating and salaries, as well as service delivery benchmarks, such as staff-client ratios. The examination of viability and benchmarking issues undertaken through this project should inform the establishment of benchmarks.

- 7. The Department of Communities should clarify with 'safe house' services that there is no regulation around not accommodating boys or young men over 11 years of age.**

Obviously there are other reasons why services may decide it is inappropriate to accommodate boys over 11 years. This is a complex issue which needs to be further explored with service providers.